Coming Together for ABC

by Bruce Remme, Executive Director

To date, 2017 has been marked by amazing support from the Southeast Minnesota community. Benefactors, event and fundraising sponsors, business partners and the volunteer community have all been a significant element in our ability to continue providing services to our participants and take care of our staff.

We continue to be challenged by the staffing crises and our inability to overcome wage pressure and increased healthcare costs. Your support makes a huge difference at a critical time. Thank you!

Earlier this year we launched Project Eagle, a strategic project that features implementing new building security measures and transforming back office support with new case management and HR/payroll software. Thanks to the support from the Otto Bremer Trust, Mayo Clinic, IBM, and many individual donations, these projects are on track for completion by end of 2017. These projects will greatly enhance security for our participants, staff, and visitors. The new software application will allow the team to be mobile and unshackled from the intensive manual process we are burden with today. Because of this awesome support, implementing Project Eagle has become a reality that will allow ABC to “Soar to New Heights.”

In September, ABC launched an exciting new annual event, Celebrating Abilities. The event afforded a great opportunity to call attention to the contributions of persons with disabilities to society as well as for participants, staff and the community at large to come together for fun and good cheer.

Celebrating Abilities would not have been possible without the efforts of a dedicated legion of volunteers. I am continually uplifted by the volunteer spirit I have witnessed in the communities we serve. Mayo Clinic Disability Merge group, IBM day of caring team, Kiwanis Aktion club, Civitan, Think Bank team, ABC Board members, staff and numerous individuals from the community have all come together in a variety of ways to support ABC.

When these groups bring their amazing talents and skills to bear in helping ABC fulfill our mission, everyone wins!

Thank you!

Hittin’ the Sand Raises $39k for Woodland

This year’s Hittin’ the Sand for Woodland raised a total of $39,400 for Woodland Industries.

Major sponsorship for ABC’s annual boat, bike and car tour event was provided by All Trades Service, LLC and McCabe Roofing. In all more than 130 organizations and individuals provided support — thank you!
ABC Partner Spotlight: Olive Garden

The Rochester Olive Garden restaurant opened in 2002 and a crew of six to seven ABC participants has been working there weekdays ever since. While the crew is present less than two hours before the doors open to the public, their contribution is critical to the successful operation of the restaurant.

“Rolling silverware at the end of a shift is a nightmare for our wait staff. Having our ABC crew do this takes a huge burden off our staff and allows them to get more done. My employees are happy, I’m happy and the ABC workers are happy. Ultimately our customers are happy, which is my bottom line” according to restaurant manager Mark Bertschinger.

For the uninitiated, “rolling silverware” entails rolling a clean set of silverware in a cloth napkin for dinner customers or in a paper napkin for lunch. Since this work can be completed while sedentary, it provides a great opportunity for participants who may need walkers or wheelchairs to have meaningful employment. The ABC team completes, on average, between 500 and 700 “rolls” each day.

Job coach Elisa Karnitz ensures that the team works together to produce efficient and quality work product each and every day. Elisa has been with the team since the start and her attention to detail and commitment to quality are legendary.

Elisa explained, “I love to see how crew members become more independent and grow to take on new challenges. I remember one crew member who struggled at first to complete ten napkins per day. Now, she completes more than 150 daily, each of the highest quality.”

Mark added that “I’m doing so many things all the time and may not otherwise realize that we’re getting short on a certain item. Elisa and the crew help me keep a handle on that. It’s a really great partnership.”

Every year the Rochester restaurant sponsors a disability mentoring day, where crew members are treated to lunch at the restaurant, get to know the staff and their jobs better, and are recognized for their accomplishments.

ABC Staff Outing to Target Field

Thanks to a generous ticket donation from the Disabled American Veterans, Department of Minnesota Chapter 28, more than 70 ABC staff and family members were able to attend a Major League Baseball game between the Minnesota Twins and Texas Rangers on August 4, 2017 at Target Field.

Despite abnormally chilly weather for mid-summer, the group had a great time getting to know one another better and cheering on the home team!
ABC Welcomes New Board Members

Dee Vasquez Sabol

Dee Vasquez Sabol is Executive Director of the Diversity Council, an organization promoting diversity as a foundation for building a healthy, inclusive and prosperous community.

She has been engaged in work on behalf of individuals with disabilities throughout her career both in Minnesota and Colorado. She has an adult son with a disability and has played the role of advocate and educator on his behalf and on behalf of others navigating systems and services.

Dee has a Masters Degree in Nonprofit Management. She also has a private fine art and design studio, a patient husband, two sons and a small menagerie. She is committed to responsible and equitable growth in the Rochester area.

Hilary Battey

Hilary Battey is the Marketing and Community Outreach Manager for R&S Transport.

Beginning in 2013, Hilary immersed herself in several departments within R&S Transport before landing in her current role. From customer care, to accounting, to human resources, Hilary has served as an advocate for handicapped and disabled population from various perspectives.

A native of Rochester, Hilary enjoys supporting her community through relationship-building and volunteering her time to several non-profits and local organizations.

Hilary looks forward to applying her knowledge and passion for volunteering as a member of the ABC Board.

Congratulations to Our Latest Lowry and WOW Award Winners

Deb Fleschner

Deb is the 4th quarter Wow award winner. She is an energetic worker on a variety of general production jobs and in the Twice Is Nice store. She is a very dependable worker who loves to crack jokes and always has a smile on her face. She is always happy to help out wherever she is needed at Woodland Industries and gets along great with customers in the store.

Rita Kermes

Rita has been in the Fulfillment area in CBE for 25 years. For the last eight years she has worked on pregnancy packets for Mayo Clinic, where she has seen her productivity increase dramatically. Rita takes much pride in putting the packets together and her work quality is exceptional. Rita is an asset to the Fulfillment area and is a joy to work with.

Chip Smith

Chip embodies everything that the Lowry Award represents. Chip never stops working, his attendance is excellent and he always maintains a positive attitude. Chip is well liked by everyone and serves as a role model for other participants and staff. The positivity he brings to his job and flexibility is outstanding. Chip’s greatest asset is his ability to forge relationships with others.

Tim Strei

Tim has made remarkable progress in overcoming obstacles to work. He now talks to staff instead of becoming angry or frustrated. He smiles and laughs a lot more. Tim has done a great job of becoming more successful here at ABC and we look forward to seeing what the future holds. Keep up the great work Tim!

Jon Wocelka

Jon is currently working in-center with a goal of achieving community employment. He does a great job following directions and maintaining a positive attitude all day long. Jon shows great pride in his daily work. He has developed independent living skills including taking the city bus and moving into his own apartment.

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Hilary looks forward to applying her knowledge and passion for volunteering as a member of the ABC Board.
ABC’s new annual event, Celebrating Abilities, was held on September 16 at Century High School. The event helped raise awareness of the amazing achievements of persons with disabilities and raised a total of $19,355 for ABC programs.

Headlining this year’s event was a screening of the award-winning short film, “Learning to Drive,” followed by an after-party with the director and lead actor. Food, games, silent auction, raffle, face-painting and henna art were just a few of the activities on offer. Think Mutual Bank served as primary sponsor with the Minnesota Autism Center, Minnesota’s FM 97.5 and the Sadler Family providing additional support. Plans are already underway for Celebrating Abilities 2018 — see you there!
TRIBUTES AND MEMORIALS

Tom Murray

Beloved former ABC Board President Tom Murray passed away peacefully on September 25, 2017, at the age of 88. Betty, his wife of 63 years, was by his side. Tom was the proud father of five daughters, many of whom continue his proud legacy of support for ABC.

Tom was originally from Mount Clemens, Michigan. He moved to Rochester in 1957 to work at the newly opened IBM plant, where he would continue working until his retirement in 1984. He then embarked on a second career that included work for the Mayo Franklin Heating Station and a volunteer leadership role with organizations including Junior Achievement, St. Pius X Church and, of course, ABC.

Tom served as President of the ABC Board for two terms — first from 1968-69 and again from 1997-1998. In addition to his formal role during these periods, Tom was a benefactor and active advocate for the organization in the community for more than 50 years.

Tom has been widely hailed as one of the pioneers of ABC, with his leadership instrumental in forging the organization ABC has become today. Tom mentored many future Board members and staff, including ABC’s current Executive Director, Bruce Remme and Development Director Laurie Kellagher.

Heartwarming stories are shared by everyone he touched over the years. In addition to his generous personal support of ABC, he drew on his extensive network of personal relationships in the community to build a enduring network of benefactors.

Tom’s support took many forms, from serving as the public face of the organization at community events to specific contributions. The boiler he donated on his 80th birthday, known fondly as the “Murray Boiler,” keeps the main ABC facility warm to this day. He launched innovative fundraising drives for many of ABC’s initiatives throughout the years, including providing matching funds for a long list of capital improvements.

Thank you Tom for your support of ABC and congratulations on a life well-lived. Your work to improve the lives of persons throughout southeastern Minnesota will never be forgotten.

Ruben Romero

On August 10th, 2017, Ruben Romero passed away at his home at the age of 62, surrounded by loved ones. Ruben had been a part of ABC for 36 years. At the time of his passing, Ruben was a regular attender in Abilities Unlimited.

Ruben loved coming to AU and hanging out with his friends. He was a friendly guy with an infectious personality, and people naturally gravitated toward him no matter where he was. He will always be remembered for his goofy sense of humor and his contagious laughter. The loss of Ruben was hard for many, but all are thankful for the opportunity to have known him and we will never forget the light he brought to our lives.

— Vaughn Hanson, Program Coordinator AU/ILS/SILS

EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT

This is to affirm Ability Building Center’s (ABC) policy of providing Equal Opportunity to all staff and applicants for employment in accordance with all applicable Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action laws, directives and regulations of Federal, State and Local governing bodies or agencies thereof, specifically Minnesota Statute 363.

ABC will not discriminate against or harass any staff or applicant for employment because of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, disability, age, marital status, or status with regard to public assistance, or sexual orientation.

If any staff or applicant for employment believes he/she has been discriminated against, please contact the Human Resource Director, 1911 NW 14 Street, PO Box 6938, Rochester, Minnesota 55903-6938, or call (507) 535-7104.

This is an condensed version of the full EEO statement available on-line at www.abcinc.org/eeo.
New Participant Spotlight: Darnell
By Ben Laaser, Extended Employment Program Coordinator

Please join us in welcoming Darnell Bell to Team ABC!

Darnell joined ABC last month and is currently working three days a week in the Production area. Darnell was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He is the youngest of eight children and enjoys returning to Chattanooga to visit his seven older sisters at their annual family reunion. Darnell and his family moved to Chicago when he was 12 years old and lived the majority of his adult life there in what he describes as “his favorite city in the United States.” Darnell recently moved to Minnesota and is currently living at the Wing House here in Rochester.

In his free time, Darnell enjoys playing video games, watching movies, and cooking. Darnell’s favorite thing to bake is any type of pie, but he said that his specialty is apple and sweet potato pie. Darnell also enjoys watching sports and has become an enthusiastic Twins fan, so much so, that he even made his own jersey to show his support for the team! (See photo at left).

Darnell looks forward to working hard and making new friends at ABC. Next time you see him in the halls or cafeteria, make sure to introduce yourself and welcome Darnell to our great team!

Help ABC continue to provide support to remarkable people like Darnell

Darnell’s employment is made possible through ABC’s Extended Employment programs, which provides necessary supports to individuals seeking to enter or reenter the workforce.

Unfortunately, funding constraints at the state and local levels, along with staffing shortages, limit the number of participants we can accept. ABC increasingly relies on individual contributions to offer these programs.

Please consider supporting the work of ABC and people like Darnell by donating online today at www.abcinc.org.