Did you know that Ability Building Center is growing? What started as a small program in Rochester back in 1956 has grown over the years to include 13 programs implemented at four separate locations throughout Southeastern Minnesota. Over the past year, the number of individuals seeking assistance with their vocational pursuits has continued to increase. Not only have the numbers of participants increased, but the geographic region these individuals come from has grown also. Over the course of the past 18 months, ABC has been able to expand its operational base by providing services to Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) consumers from the Red Wing, Mankato, St. Peters and Austin areas.

Without a doubt, the need for effective Vocational Services programming is growing. The South Metro VRS office, located in Burnsville, currently serves over 800 individuals with disabilities on an annual basis. In July of 2013, they expanded and opened a second regional office in Apple Valley to accommodate their influx of new clientele. With this expansion, they expect to increase their number of individuals served from 800 annually to over 1,200 annually by 2015. With this growth and influx of clients comes the need for experienced and effective Certified Rehabilitation Providers. ABC is uniquely equipped to fill this void!

With the dawn of a new year, ABC is pleased to announce the establishment of its fourth satellite: ABC Metro. Located at 7373 West 147th Street in Apple Valley, MN, ABC Metro is strategically positioned within one mile of the new VRS office in Apple Valley. ABC Metro will focus on providing the Vocational Evaluation, Work Adjustment Training, Job Seeking Skills Training and Competitive Placement programs.

In February of 2014, ABC Metro received its first referral and began to provide programming services. This marks a new chapter in the storied history of this great organization. Though we exist in five separate locations, we work together as one organization to fulfill our mission: “To improve the quality of life in Southeastern Minnesota by providing rehabilitation and employment services for persons with disabilities and other special needs.”

Written by Mike Stehr, Vocational Services Program Manager
Benefactors Breakfast

Our Benefactor’s Breakfast was a success again this year, with 70 people in attendance. Steve Hill gave us the results of our efforts from the roof project, with a total of $198,000 raised: $102,100 from grants and $95,900 from our donors. Many thanks to all our benefactors! Steve then gave a development update on our new office in Apple Valley (see cover page), and the updated accounting software that we are preparing to buy, with the help of our benefactors.

Thanks also to our speakers: Randy Pavesich, Bruce Remme and Jim Behr. Your stories inspire us and motivate us to garner even more support for ABC!

Providing meaningful work opportunities brings value to Mayo Clinic

In 2006, Jim Behr spent six weeks at Mayo Clinic after a work accident that left him requiring the use of a wheelchair for mobility. Mayo is again helping Behr’s recovery, but this time in a way that requires no medical personnel and makes good business sense for Mayo Clinic.

Through an agreement Mayo Clinic has with Ability Building Center (ABC), Behr works each week packaging DVDs and scanning images and documents as part of Mayo Clinic’s ABC Project Assistance Team (ABC-PAT), and he explains that the work has been an important part of his recovery. “In the last year things have started to fall into place, and the job has been a huge part of it,” says Behr. “It gives me knowledge. It’s complex and challenging.”

The same is true of Behr’s colleague Nathan Emery. Despite personal challenges, Emery refurbishes computers, making the scanning and complex photo editing he does at Mayo Clinic the perfect fit for his skills. “Some photos are so warped it can take a really long time to edit them in Photoshop,” says Emery. “But I enjoy doing it.”

“Earning a wage, and having the ability to work in a professional environment empowers ABC workers,” says Steve Hill, Executive Director of ABC. “They love that they are able to work every day and be part of Mayo.”

Media Support Services originally created the project assistance team at the Mayo Support Center to scan negatives of historical photos. “It becomes more affordable to let ABC do it,” says Eric Berg, Media Support Services, who manages the ABC-PAT for Mayo Clinic. “It allows Mayo to use its employees for projects better fit for their skills.”

The Team has since branched out to help elsewhere, packaging DVDs, delivering finished projects to the Media Support Services intake office and scanning documents for additional areas. The group has done everything from scanning student records for education to documents for Treasury Services.

Jamie Nandory, the ABC job coach who oversees the ABC-PAT, recently started preparing for their latest project – scanning thousands of documents for the legal department.

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On September 16th, 2013, a team of three Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) surveyors visited ABC to decide whether ABC should be accredited. During their three days at ABC, they applied over 800 quality standards to determine at what level, if any, ABC should be accredited. I’m very pleased to report that ABC achieved a “three-year” accreditation which is the maximum level of accreditation an organization can receive.

There were three recommendations made by the surveyors. A recommendation represents non-compliance with a quality standard. This is the lowest number of recommendations that ABC has ever received from a survey. The surveyors also identified twenty-one areas of strengths during the survey process. Some quotes from their report exemplify our strengths. For example, “the health and safety of persons served is a central focus for both management and the frontline staff members,” “Services provided by ABC are person centered and very individualized to the benefit of the persons served,” and “Vocational options are identified that match interest and abilities of persons served prior to community job placement of persons served.”

Preparation for a successful CARF survey cannot be achieved with just a few hours or days of work. ABC began preparing for our next survey in three years shortly after the surveyors left our building on September 18th. Successful preparation requires years of planning and execution of the CARF standards. I want to take this opportunity to thank our Board of Directors, staff, and community partners for all the effort and work they put into making this a very successful CARF survey for ABC.

If you are interested in learning more about the CARF survey, feel free to contact myself, another staff or a board member. We’d be happy to share the full written report with you.
Congratulations!

Mark Ekstrom works in different work areas as needed, and he is always eager to do new jobs. He has overcome many physical challenges with a positive attitude. He is always friendly with his co-workers, and he likes to “tease” in an appropriate manner. When Mark is in the work area he is a positive role model for his co-workers. Mark is why ABC works!

Vihn Hoang is always ready to go and is the first person to the van. He helps staff remember what supplies are needed and which crew members are going each day. When Vihn gets to the job site, he knows what to do and needs no prompting to get to work. Vihn is very thorough with his cleaning and never has to re-do his work. He takes it upon himself to do extra tasks. Vihn really takes pride in his work and how he is dressed.

On January 30th, 2014, Wayne Hafner was Woodland Industries’ first quarter WOW Award winner. Wayne has worked at Woodland since June, 1995. Wayne has proven himself to be a hard worker and a dedicated employee. He always has a positive work attitude. Wayne likes to work in center and keeps himself busy bagging or boxing bolts and screws. He is always friendly and courteous towards his co-workers and staff. Congratulations, Wayne!

Woodland Industries in Caledonia will forever remember Ahna Johnson, who passed away on Monday, December 9th of 2013 after a courageous battle with cancer. Ahna started her work at ABC Works (formerly the Developmental Achievement Center), and transitioned into Woodland Industries, where she worked for over 30 years and had several accomplishments, including being Employee of the Year in 1993 and Woodland’s Outstanding Worker in 2007. Ahna did a variety of tasks in center at Woodland, worked in sewing, and was employed out in the community, where she held a position at our Enclave at Chartwells Dining, University of Wisconsin La Crosse in the dish room. Ahna loved shopping in the Twice is Nice store and could usually be seen at local garage sales. She had a sparkling personality and everyone who knew her enjoyed her company. Ahna will be truly missed by all.

On February 7th, 2014, staff and participants wore red to raise awareness for heart disease, which is the number one killer of women in the United States. Thanks to everyone who participated!

Memorial
New Opportunities for ABC

A new and exciting opportunity for ABC in 2013 is our contract with People’s Food Co-op, who opened their new location in the summer of 2013. We have a number of people working within the Co-op. We have dish washers in their kitchen area, as well as their deli area. We also have participants bussing tables in the dining area and we have a crew packaging dry foods in the kitchen area. Many of these jobs are seven days a week, and currently ABC has upwards of 30 people working on a weekly basis at People’s Food Co-op.

This has been a great partnership for ABC, and the participants are excited to be a part of this new facility!

Miken Sports was first founded in 1998 in Hartland, WI with two partners experimenting in composite parts. In 1998, Jeb Griffith saw the potential for this technology in slow pitch softball bats and invested in the company. In 1999, Miken Sports moved to Caledonia, MN and has been leading the field of composite technology with different bats. In 2009, they expanded to make MV-1 hockey sticks. Woodland Industries partnered up with Miken in December of 2012, starting with a job coach and 3-4 participants working Monday through Thursday, six hours per day. Today, we continue our partnership with Miken doing various production work, and currently have 8-10 participants working Monday through Friday, six hours per day. This partnership gives our participants community work, and the opportunity to learn many different aspects of production. From making boxes to running machines, our participants get a fulfilling, rewarding experience, and the Miken employees are very helpful and have built many friendships with Woodland Industries. Not only do we have participants working directly at Miken, but we are fortunate to also have in center work for our participants. Participants assemble plastic bat coverings and this gives at least 10 more participants the opportunity to work on general production work here at Woodland. Woodland Industries appreciates Miken’s flexibility with trying different participants on different work tasks and giving us such a rewarding work experience.

Master Metals, a company specializing in custom sheet metal, is a newly acquired community job located in Onalaska, WI. They currently employ 2 individuals from ABC Works in La Crescent. This team has custodial responsibilities at this site and is very excited about their new Center Based Employment opportunity!
ABC Hosts AM Expresso!

Ability Building Center had the opportunity to host the February 2014 Rochester Chamber AM Expresso on February 7th, 2014 at its corporate location on 1911 NW 14th Street. The Rochester Chamber sponsors the AM Expresso throughout the year, with a different business hosting each month. This event is a networking opportunity for local businesses to meet and visit with other businesses from the area. ABC was proud to have one of the largest turnouts that the Chamber has ever seen, with 135 attendees.

Many of the Chamber members who attended already partner with ABC in our mission to improve the quality of life in Southeastern Minnesota by providing rehabilitation and employment services for persons with disabilities and other special needs. After the networking and formal part of the program, ABC offered tours of its facility and an introduction to all that we do at ABC. People who take the time to tour ABC are always amazed at all that we do both in the community as well as in center.

A special thanks to Steve Kann from our Board who stepped in as our emcee for Steve Hill, our Executive Director, who had a family emergency. He did a great job.

Another great day at ABC! Many thanks to all who helped make it possible.

Written by Doug Schommer, Business Developer

Above: Steve Kann steps up as emcee.