Steve Hill Retires After 36 Years of Dedicated Service

After more than 36 years employed by Ability Building Center (ABC), Steve Hill announced his retirement. Hill began his employment at ABC in 1980, serving in the capacity of Assistant Director. In 2001, he was promoted to Executive Director and will serve in that capacity until April 29th of this year. According to Hill, “ABC is a great organization, with a great mission. It has been a wonderful experience to see and be a part of the many positive changes that have occurred in the lives of persons with disabilities over the past 3 decades.”

hopefully retirement will afford me more time to devote to my family and maybe even a little more time for fly fishing!

Kreg A. Kauffman, President of the ABC Board of Directors commented: “The Board of Directors thanks Steve Hill for his years of service to the stakeholders and mission of ABC. We will miss him.”

Join us for a community reception on Friday, April 29th, 1:00-4:00pm in the ABC cafeteria.

ABC Welcomes Bruce Remme as Executive Director

Bruce joined ABC in March 2016, after a 35 year career with IBM in Finance, Integrated Supply Chain and Business Operations. Bruce has been involved at ABC since 1995 as a volunteer as Board Treasurer, Vice President, President, and has served on the Finance, Investment and Development Committees. He also serves on the Board of Directors for Think Mutual Bank. Bruce has a B.S. Business Management degree from St. Cloud State University-St. Cloud, MN and a Masters of Business Administration from the University of Wisconsin - LaCrosse, WI.

It is an honor to be chosen to lead this organization. I am committed to build off the legacy and success of the past 60 years, have some fun celebrating ABC’s 60th Anniversary in 2016, and position ABC for continued success.
Warehouse Finds Success by Partnering with ABC

Charter has found a successful partnership with an organization out of southern Minnesota called Ability Building Center (ABC) – an organization that serves adults with disabilities to work in the community.

Brad Oberle, Supply Chain Hub leader, was looking for a way to create operational efficiencies during the All-Digital project in June 2014. His goal was to free up full time employees so they could focus on other tasks. Hiring temporary employees was one way to do that, but finding good temporary help proved to be a challenge. Brad started brainstorming and decided to call on ABC to see if their services matched Charter’s needs.

When ABC Business Developer, Jeff Walthers received the call, he was excited to get ABC program participants placed with Charter because the type of work performed in a warehouse is so different from the typical opportunities presented to the participants. “The environment at Charter is very attractive. A lot of our participants have never been to a warehouse and they are fascinated by the hustle and bustle,” says Walther.

Participants work on tasks that best fits their abilities. During Charter’s All-Digital project they sorted cable cords and put stickers on digital receivers. Currently, participants are focused on cleaning digital receivers, checking for dents and getting the boxes ready to go out to customers.

Both Walther and Oberle agree that starting out is not always an easy transition – and that a commitment is required from each organization. “It was a bit of a rough start,” said Oberle, “Not everyone knew how to communicate with each other or how to handle situations that occasionally came up. We also needed to get the right participants in place and had to figure out how to work best together.” And that is exactly what happened.

Walther noted the employees at Charter have been very supportive and helpful. The staff and management have gone out of their way to make sure ABC participants get what they need to be successful – such as setting up visual boards and adding tables to their workspace. “Not every day is the same and it can be challenging, but Charter has worked with us beautifully. Charter is an everyday household name which is exciting to our participants. They get to wear lanyards with their picture on it and have a name badge; and that is a big deal to them. It makes them proud to show their badge and share that they work for this well-known company,” said Walthers.

The partnership creates an engaging environment for ABC participants, like Andy Goodman, who love coming to work each day. “I like working for Charter and I like vacuuming the boxes. They come from all over and I get to clean them up.” says Goodman. “I made some friends here too, like Jim (Glocke, warehouse technician) He’s a good guy and makes me laugh.”

The partnership Charter and ABC created is one that Oberle plans to continue. “It’s a good feeling to know Charter is providing a place for disabled workers. ABC program participants have become a part of the Charter family and we are grateful for their assistance,” Oberle concluded.

Written by: Kimberly Noetzel, Senior Manager, Charter Communications

Tracy’s Path to Independent Employment

Tracey Ihns began working at ABC through Ability Enterprises in January of 2013. In January of 2014, she started a job working independently two days a week at the People’s Food Co-op. Her position was working the front deli dish room area. From the beginning, Tracy picked up the duties very quickly and impressed her co-workers with her competence and ability to do the job very well. Because Tracy made such a good impression and formed great relationships with her co-workers at the Co-op, she was encouraged by them to apply for a direct hire position. In the fall of 2015, Tracy applied and was hired! In November she began her work at the Co-op doing food prep, serving customers, and many other tasks. Tracy has done so well that she was awarded Employee of the Month in December! She loves her job and continues to grow in her skills and responsibilities. She no longer needs to utilize ABC services, so though we will miss Tracy, we are so proud of her accomplishments!

Written by Kerri Vagness, Program Coordinator
Consistency and Quality in Our State

ABC once again formed a group to go to The Day at The Capital. This day’s purpose was to bring people to the capital to help show how accessible our elected officials are and how one can personally make a difference in the laws in which govern us. There was a rally and a large group of individuals who listened to some of Minnesota’s elected officials talk about services to the disabled. Topics that were discussed included becoming more independent by working in the community and funding for processes and supports, such as staffing. The Capital was still under construction so we were unable to go into the physical structure, however, we were able to visit elected official’s offices to provide them with letters detailing how services directly affect us all. Events like this highlight the importance of having access to our elected officials so that we can advocate for laws that positively impact the lives of individuals with disabilities.

Written by Tom Schultz, Supported Employment Program Coordinator

Creative Options for Individuals in Houston County

Have you ever looked around and thought to yourself, “I have worked hard for many years - it sure would be nice if I could do some fun things within my community other than work?” Have you ever found yourself wondering what life might be like if you were given different options? ABC Works, located in Houston County, offers just that through our “Options” program. The Options program serves 10 individuals at a site in downtown Caledonia. Options offers recreational activities including, but not limited to: Senior dining, day trips, boat rides, theme days, arts & crafts, outings in the community, baking, and sewing - to name a few. Cindy Andrews puts in countless hours organizing and creating projects and activities that make this program a success! Many thanks to Cindy and her co-workers for their creativity and dedication to this extended service for people served! The Options program will soon be looking at a new location, as the current building is no longer going to be available. This new location is yet to be determined, but we are certain that the show will go on, and that people will continue to look forward to whatever it is that these talented ladies come up with to keep everyone entertained!

Written by Sheila Heberlein, Program Coordinator

Pictured here, enjoying some of the holiday activities this Spring are #1) Corrine Williams, demonstrating her baking skills & Irish spirit by decorating shamrock cookies; #2) Diane Shuda, coloring Easter eggs; #3) Janice Nelson, Carol Demorest, & Lucy Wilkes, showing off their Easter Bunnies that they made out of squares of fleece; #4 Harry Hefner, demonstrating his unique skill of balancing bunnies on his head;
In Memory of Angela Murphy

On March 7, 2016, we said goodbye to Angela Murphy. Angela’s love for life, literacy, learning, and looking at the lighter side of life was evident in everything she did. Her kindness and genuine nature spread not only to her family, but to everyone with whom she came into contact. Her dedication to her family was unsurpassed, as was her dedication to making life better for others throughout her community.

Angela passed down her patience, wonderful sense of humor, & her passion for writing and for life to her family and her husband Tom & their children, Katie & John – ever there for them – ever guiding them – ever attentive.

Angela was also involved in many facets of life throughout Caledonia where she resided, including publishing the Caledonia Argus with her husband Tom for many years, helping at the Caledonia Library, and countless hours volunteering at the Houston County Historical Society.

Her journalism skills were put to good use not only doing research at the Historical Society, but also during the years that she sat as Secretary on the board at ABC. Angela also served on the DAC, NetWorks, and Woodland Industries boards for many years. During this time, Angela focussed on assuring that the voice of both participants and staff were heard.

Angela left a beautiful example of compassion and friendship. In closing, I leave you with a thought from one of my last conversations with Angela:

When talking about various levels of “happy” She stated, “Happiness is not always an experience – sometimes it’s a memory.”

I truly believe that she would want nothing more than for us all to be happy – so cheers to her our memories of Angela Murphy!

ABC Remembers Curtis Cady

Curtis Cady, a dedicated ABC worker, passed away on January 20th 2016. Curtis began his employment with ABC in 1988. Curtis loved working at ABC and often spoke of his desire to work at ABC until he was 100 years old. In addition to work, Curtis enjoyed participating in recreational activities at ABC. He was a member of the Aktion Club, Worker Advisory, and weaving class. Curtis was an avid Vikings and Twins fan and enjoyed discussing sports with his coworkers. Curtis was known for his friendly nature; he always approached others with a big smile and enjoyed sparking conversation.

Curtis was a friend to all of us and will be greatly missed at ABC.
In 1956, at the recommendation of the Governor’s Advisory Commission on the Handicapped and a small group of citizens from Rochester, a committee was formed to identify the needs of people with disabilities in the area. They found the need for employment in a safe supportive environment to be a top priority. In those days, many people with disabilities had either never worked or had not worked for a considerable amount of time. After several months of planning, Ability Building Center (ABC) Incorporated, a nonprofit organization, opened its doors in the basement of the Samaritan Bethany Nursing Home. On January 4, 1957, with three employees, ABC began assembling 50,000 souvenir tom-tom drums for LeRoy Shane Company.

Within the next 10 years, ABC made several moves and expansions as it continued to add employees, jobs and services. ABC finally settled into its current location, 1911 14th Street NW, in 1979 and again found the need for additional space by the late 80’s.

In 1980, ABC Woodland Industries opened in Houston County. Thirty-six years later, Woodland Industries continues to provide vocational services to people with disabilities in several rural SE Minnesota communities.

The 1990s marked a time for program additions and transitions. Ability Enterprises (AE) opened its doors in the 1500 building in NW Rochester in 1991, serving people interested in working but with a higher level of need for support. In 1995 ABC adopted PACTT (People Achieving Change Through Technology).

Abilities Unlimited (AU) opened their Adult Day Program for people with brain injuries to three participants in the fall of 1996. AU utilized local businesses, public transportation and peer supports to offer participants natural learning experiences. Currently, AU serves 70 participants in their Day Program and Independent Living Skills Program.

In the summer of 2001, ABC made yet another expansion by adding ABC Works to the list of programs and services available throughout SE Minnesota. ABC Works has two locations, La Crescent and Caledonia, and offers employment opportunities as well as social, recreational, communication and therapy supports.

Help us celebrate!

Open House • August 18, 9:00am-11:00am

In honor of 60 years of impact our goal is to raise an additional $60,000
Thanks
to everyone who contributed to our new “used” truck.
You should see it out on the road delivering and picking up work for our production departments!

Calendar of Events

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>May 24</td>
<td>3:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Annual Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 6</td>
<td>Noon</td>
<td>“On the Tee” with ABC Golf Tournament</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 18</td>
<td>7:05 p.m.</td>
<td>Honkers Baseball Game</td>
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<td>June 23</td>
<td>11:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Thursdays on First &amp; Third</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 24</td>
<td>6:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Rochesterfest Parade</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 29</td>
<td>7:05 p.m.</td>
<td>Honkers Baseball Game</td>
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<td>June 30</td>
<td>11:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Thursdays on First &amp; Third</td>
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<td>July 7</td>
<td>11:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Thursdays on First &amp; Third</td>
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<td>August 13</td>
<td>10:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Hittin’ the Sand for Woodland</td>
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<td>August 18</td>
<td>9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.</td>
<td>11:30 a.m.</td>
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<td>October 11</td>
<td>5:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Rochester Annual Awards Banquet</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 27</td>
<td>5:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Houston County Annual Awards Banquet</td>
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