Many different things can inspire someone to donate. It is easy to empathize with the people you see at Ability Building Center (ABC) when you witness how their lives are changed. But when a family member is a part of the ABC community, that feeling can ripple through other members in your family as well. The Claeys family is evidence of that.

Jon Claeys is the father of Todd Claeys, a School to Work program participant. When Jon attended the Benefactor’s breakfast last year, he was inspired by what he saw and decided to give back. This is his story:

Our family’s experience with ABC was fabulous. Todd gained so much valuable experience through the job rotations and the School to Work program. Todd became so responsible, dependable and self-sufficient in work and life skills through the work experiences provided by ABC. The job coaches need to be acknowledged as helpful, strong and good people. In a word, our overall experience was “fabulous.”

We chose to donate directly to ABC because of ABC’s wide ranging impact on its employees. We were inspired at last year’s Benefactor breakfast. The morning of the breakfast, I had the opportunity to see many of the ABC employees coming to work – some working on site and others heading out for other businesses. I recognized and knew so many of those ABC employees, both young and old. I thought, “Wow. This business is making such an enormous difference in the lives of all these people! ABC is truly a blessing.”

When the Benefactor’s breakfast began, it was announced that the facility needed a new roof, costing approximately $300,000. I was already done with my charitable giving for the year, but my mind raced. “I had to do something for ABC,” I thought. “This was too good of a cause. For all those employees that I’d just seen walking in, this place does too much good for all of these folks to do nothing. What better cause could there be?”

I talked to my wife Laurie to see what we might do. She agreed that we’d donate IBM stock.

“Painless” — in a word, a stock donation to ABC was “painless.” Stock donations work well for my situation. It was so easy. I called ABC and they gave me a contact name. She was familiar with the forms and gave me the necessary instructions and information to fill out. Then we got a Medallion signature, mailed the forms and it was a done deal. Painless!”

Jon contacted Laurie at ABC and she provided him the information for the stock transfer. He liked that he could take the stock out and give it to us (a non-profit) without being taxed, and that he was able to claim the donation as a tax-deductible contribution.

Some suggestions for ways to give are listed on the ABC website at www.abcinc.org/donate, or feel free to call Laurie Kellagher, Development Director at (507) 535-7105.

Written by Jon Claeys and Amelia Masbruch, Newsletter Editor
Kreg Kauff, the Vice President of the Ability Building Center (ABC) Board, was our master of ceremonies. Randy Pavesich welcomed everyone to the Rochester banquet, using his DynaVox device to help him convey his speech. He loves working at Dooley’s and finds that the one-to-one ratio of job coach to participant is very important to him. He cherishes the outings to the dog park and the movies. He knows these things are important to other participants, and he thanks everyone for everything they do to create and support the ABC community. He ended his speech with a “Woo-hoo!”, eliciting laughter from everyone and setting the stage for the rest of the night.

The Rochester International Event Center was at full capacity, with 650 people in attendance. Steve Hill took the stage, recognizing the many volunteers that help make ABC run smoothly. Steve Kann recognized our Benefactors and thanked our table sponsors who donated $4,090 to help with the cost of this event.

During the length of service awards, many spoke of their gratitude for the help that everyone in the ABC community is eager and willing to provide. Congratulations to Jim Behr, Mike Brown, Lenny Curtis, Marten Dirks, Kevin Hovorka and Megan Whaley, our Lowry Award winners who were recognized for achieving their program goals. The Business Partner of the Year, Progressive Tool and Manufacturing, was recognized for providing in-center work to ABC, along with Paramark Corporation, the Employer of the Year, for providing community work.

There were 280 people in attendance at the Houston County banquet. Travis Gordon, proud employee of SmoothToe Socks, did this year’s invocation. He thanked all those in the community who support the programs at ABC Works and Woodland Industries. He elaborated that by the supporters’ efforts, we are able to reach our goals for work and inclusion.

Steve Hill served as emcee, thanking all of the volunteers and inviting them to stand or raise their hands while the room applauded. Judy Tollefsrud was recognized, and received a plaque for being the longest-serving board member, with 25 years of service.

ABC Works’ Employer of the Year Award went to Crazy L’s Saloon, who welcomed a crew of four into their business. Woodland Industries’ Employer of the Year Award went to Caledonia School District for providing work for seven individuals – five people in the elementary and high school lunch rooms, and two who work as crossing guards.

This year’s Business Partner of the Year was Miken Sports, who provides us with general production work, and always takes time out of their day to check on crews and say hello.

Jim Belles won the Employee of the Year Award for ABC Works. Jim showed his appreciation for the award by kissing his plaque and raising it high above his head. Kim Wiese was the winner of Woodland Industries’ Employee of the Year for all her hard work and dedication as a crossing guard for Caledonia Elementary School.

This year’s Vicki Wilkes Spirit of Independence Award winner was Joe Gorman. He is commended for being so knowledgeable about all of his jobs that even job coaches can go to him with questions.

Thanks to McCabe Roofing and Don and Lavona Meiners, our two table sponsors who donated over one thousand dollars! Thanks to all 460 benefactors of ABC – who donated $428,000 in 2012 to support our programs and services. And finally, thanks to all who made this night possible!
Hittin’ the Sand for Woodland!

Once again, ABC Works & Woodland Industries’ annual Car, Boat and Bike Cruise brought Houston County together at Wildcat Landing on August 10, 2013. Nearly 100 area businesses sponsored the event, while car cruisers, boaters, and volleyball teams enjoyed fun on the river, the road, and the sand. More than 300 community members gathered on the Mississippi River at our live auction in support of our mission, generating funds of more than $23,000! A little county with a huge heart continues to stand by us in our efforts to improve the quality of life for persons with special needs. With gratitude, we close down this year’s festivities and look forward to seeing everyone in 2014!

Written by Sheila Heberlein, ABC Works Program Coordinator

“On the Tee” with ABC - This Year’s Success Story

Steve Hulbert was the speaker at this year’s Ability Building Center (ABC) golf tournament. He did a fantastic job conveying the importance of his past eight years of employment with ABC, and how he has grown personally and professionally from it.

Steve spoke about how he has learned a lot from working at ABC, about being patient and how to be a good employee. ABC helped keep his dream of becoming independently employed alive, and helped him regain the confidence he needed to work independently. He acknowledged that before, if life got too hard, he would just quit. ABC helped give him the confidence necessary to follow through with his goals. In his words, “the sky is the limit!”

In 2005, he was a part of the evaluation program at ABC, and from then on, he went on to succeed at a variety of jobs. In 2011, he accepted the breakfast attendant position with Guesthouse, and he continues to work as a housekeeper for Courtyard Marriott. He also works seasonally at Deer Creek race track. In December of 2011, he was honored to win the Lowry Award, an award given to him for his outstanding work ethic, good attitude and willingness to build new skills. This was his first recognition from a company.

This year’s golf tournament was a success, and we raised $61,430 for ABC programs and services! Please save the date for next year’s tournament, which will be held on June 9, 2014.

Written by Amelia Masbruch, Newsletter Editor
Congratulations!

Jerry Kurtz was Woodland’s 3rd quarter WOW Award winner. He is always willing to help out and learn new jobs. Jerry has great attendance and can change to a different job without any problems.

Memorials

ABC Works in La Crescent will forever remember Nicole Dewitt, who passed away on Sunday, June 30, 2013. She graduated from La Crescent High School and began working at ABC in 2009. Nicole was a beautiful young lady who always had a huge smile on her face. She loved being read to, listening to music and going for walks. She is remembered most for being a “social butterfly” by all the staff and participants. Nicole’s bubbly personality had a way of putting a smile on the face of everyone that she came in contact with. It has been a pleasure knowing and working with Nicole, and she will be missed by all!

Robert Lampert passed away on December 14, 2012 at the age of 69. Robert grew up on a farm near Freeburg, Minnesota and later moved to LaCrescent, where he started at ABC Works in 1995. Robert always did his best to carry on the traditions of growing up on a farm and working hard. He enjoyed his jobs, especially his paper route. He loved having fun with his friends and being part of the ABC family. Robert’s quiet demeanor and big smile made him very likeable and he will be missed by his many friends at ABC.

Marten Dirks started working at Ability Building Center in October of 1988. Over the past 25 years, Marten worked in various programs and at various businesses in Rochester. Marten spent the past 1 ½ years working at the Microtel Inn and Suites. Marten was a man who loved life. He took what he was given and made the best out of every situation. He loved doing what he was good at and appreciated by all who knew him. He was a light-hearted gentleman and offered a sincere attitude that others could learn from. Jim was a diverse individual who had many talents. Among them were farming, laboratory technician, construction and a special gift for furniture making. James Leo Ernst passed away on Thursday, October 3, 2013 after a brief bout with cancer.

Kevin Hovorka is helpful to his co-workers, always pleasant and willing to assist as needed. He has been a strong worker on every custodial crew he works with. Kevin takes the lead in getting the work done. He is a high energy kind of guy and strives to do his best and to be helpful. All Job Coaches who work with him appreciate his “get it done” attitude, his flexibility and his willingness to work any shift. Kevin has made many adjustments and improvements in understanding work expectations, which makes him an employee in demand at ABC.

Megan Whaley is essential to the success and daily operation of Ability Built Computers and ABC in many ways. She is a self-starter and finds ways to stay efficient and helpful when she has not received specific direction or assignments. Megan is a leader and an advocate in her work area and accepts responsibilities, tasks and projects without complaint, and works to solve each issue with ambition. Often her achievements go unnoticed (she is frequently responsible for building workstations and fixing PC issues here at ABC—she may have even worked on your computer!), however, Megan is instrumental to the progress of Ability Built Computers and Ability Building Center.

Phil Severson worked at a variety of locations. He took pride in his community based jobs, especially ones that had a uniform. He enjoyed doing packaging and assembly at Ability Enterprises in between community jobs, and at the end of his work career. In Ability Options he enjoyed games and discussions that involved TV show trivia. He also liked to draw pictures of his favorite TV shows. Phil recently won a ribbon at the Olmsted County Fair for a drawing he submitted on Saved By The Bell. Phil enjoyed traveling. He traveled to Alaska, Boston, Washington D.C., New York City and many other destinations. He often returned with stories of meeting famous people. Phil will be missed by his many friends at ABC!
Corrine and friends often bring carrots or bread to feed the animals at the Houston County Fairgrounds.

Abilities Unlimited participants gather in front of a B-25 bomber plane at the Rochester airport.

Dave and Emily of the Abilities Unlimited program pose in front of the Arts and Ability display at Mayo Clinic.

Kellie and Nicole of the School to Work program show off their display at a Honkers game.

From left to right: Dan, Kyle, Melissa and Pam of Ability Enterprises pose with Viktor the Viking at Vikings Training Camp.

Brian of the Ability Enterprises program holds up one of his three rainbow trout caught at the Lanesboro DNR fishing trip.
Golf Outing at Piper Hills

On October 3, 2013, Josh Jewell, Andrew Young, Dan Griesmann and I (Katie Shea) got a chance to golf at Piper Hills Golf Course in Plainview, MN. We could not have asked for better weather that day; the sun was shining and the temperature was perfect for a day on the golf course. All three of the guys have golfed before and love to do so. Dan is an avid golfer with the Special Olympics, Andrew has golfed many times with his dad and Josh enjoys golfing but does not get out as much as he would like. We played nine holes at the course and had a wonderful time. I was able to get some great action shots of the guys teeing off and swinging like the pros. Of course, we did not keep score because we played best ball, but we got a chance to play from everyone’s shot once or twice, and Josh even sunk a 10-foot putt!

After the round, we had a wonderful meal at the course restaurant. We got to drink soda, eat lunch and enjoy one another’s company. We took another great picture of the guys toasting to a great day of golf! By the time we drove home, they were tired out; all 3 guys dozed off for a bit on the way.

Written by Katie Shea, AE Program Coordinator

From left to right: Dan, Andrew and Josh at Piper Hills Golf Course

Board News: Meet Barb Cage

Barb has been the Executive Director for Camp Winnebago since mid-February of 2011. She has 6 children and 10 grandchildren (soon to be 11 when her grandson is born in December 2013), so she has a bit of experience with children.

Barb was the Executive Director of the Florida Lions Camp in Lake Wales, FL for nearly 15 years prior to accepting her position at Camp Winnebago for the second time (she was camp director at Camp Winnebago from 1993 – mid-1997). Before working as a camping professional, she worked in a variety of positions for Hiawatha Homes in Rochester, MN from 1979 – 1992. In her last position there, she supervised a program to aid families that had children with severe disabilities living at home.

Welcome to the ABC Board, Barb!