ABC Forges Ahead “Into the Future”

by Bruce Remme, Executive Director

Recent years have brought dramatic changes to ABC, many of which I have highlighted in past newsletters. This environment has invigorated a new culture and passion for carrying our mission “Into the Future.”

I often like to reflect on our founders and what they had to overcome 63 years ago in establishing ABC, offering the revolutionary idea (at the time) that people with disabilities deserve an opportunity to be in the community doing meaningful work and activities.

Fast-forward to today and you will find that ABC is taking that spirit to a new level. Competitive integrated employment, new recreation and leisure opportunities, growth in providing independent living services, brain injury rehabilitation and more.

The past year has seen organizational restructuring, a new leadership team, strategic direction discussions, policy changes driven by the Olmstead Plan, funding shifts and reductions, and regulatory requirements. If you can name it, it likely underwent a transformation.

Just a few things our community of supporters, stakeholders, Board of Directors and staff achieved during 2018:

- Serving over 700 participants throughout Southeastern Minnesota;
- Achieving a stakeholder satisfaction rate of 98 percent;
- Entering the second year of deploying Person Centered Practices across the organization, top to bottom;
- Deepening our relationships with key business partners who rely on ABC for product fulfillment and a reliable workforce day-in and day-out;
- Improving our information technology infrastructure; and
- Achieving our fundraising goals.

These are not changes for the sake of change, but rather organizational transformations to provide the best level of service for our participants possible in a rapidly changing world.

With this transformation, ABC is positioned to continue its success for many years to come. I say this with confidence knowing that we can continue to count on amazing support from our community and the dedicated hard work of our staff.

As always, THANK YOU for everything you do!
I was raised in an era when individuals with disabilities were routinely segregated from the general population. At school, children with disabilities were separated from other students. They ate lunch at a separate table. They studied in a separate classroom and had little to no interaction with other students. Students were given the opportunity to earn extra credit by volunteering in the special education classroom. I signed up for this, hoping to learn and understand. I received no training or support, and left fearful of those that were different than me.

Growing up, I had an uncle with autism, a 2nd cousin with schizophrenia and a parent who battled depression. These disabilities were not discussed. As a teen, when I struggled with my own mental health, I saw it as a weakness and as an area that I was failing at in life. I had little understanding of how disabilities impact people, and more importantly, of how individuals with disabilities make a positive impact on the world around us.

In the summer of 2014, my father-in-law was riding his motorcycle on his birthday when a deer ran out in front of him and he was thrown from his bike. He was airlifted to Mayo Clinic and placed in a medically induced coma. He remained in the coma for almost a month to allow his brain time to reduce swelling. When he awoke, he was diagnosed with a brain injury. My husband and I realized at that moment how important family is, and how life can change drastically in a moment. We decided to move from Winona to Rochester to be closer to him and other family members.

As I searched for a job, I saw a posting for a Coordinator position at ABC. As I scrolled through ABC’s web site and read about the mission, I realized for the first time how important it is to support the disability community. I thought to myself “this seems like the perfect fit for me.” I applied and accepted a position. I was hopeful about the job, but never realized just how much of an impact ABC would have on my life.

I can say, with all honesty, that working at ABC has been the most rewarding career of my life. Every day I walk in to work happy, excited to spend time with the individuals that we serve. I am able to see people accomplish their goals, overcome obstacles, and work towards the future that they want. There are no words to describe how lucky I am that I found ABC. I am the fortunate one, and because of that, I have the desire to give back in any way that I can.

It’s no secret that budget cuts have impacted ABC. As a non-profit manager, I don’t necessarily have an abundance of funds to give back to ABC. I am, however, able to give back in other ways. This year my husband decided that it was time to upgrade his vehicle. As a way to give back, we decided to donate the vehicle to ABC. It was an old, beat-up Corolla, with almost 300,000 miles on it. Believe it or not, we were able get $1,200 for ABC through the sale. ABC took care of the entire transaction, all we had to do was the leave the car in the parking lot and give the keys to Bruce Remme. Another way that I have been able to give back is by promoting ABC on Facebook. I started a birthday fundraiser, promoted Give to the Max Day, and encouraged people to start a fundraiser on Giving Tuesday. Through these action, I have been able to give back to ABC in ways that I normally would not be able to.

I encourage you to think outside of the box and come up with different ways to give. The impact that ABC has on the community is immeasurable, I’m proud to say that I am a supporter.
ABC IN ACTION

ABC Prom

United Way Week is held every year in early October at ABC. This is a week full of fun activities, including a staff jail and “pie in the face” contest. For the first time this year activities included a participant prom dance party. The event gained traction after Vince “promposed” to Chelsea and the video went viral on Facebook (photo at left).

The ABC cafeteria was turned into a dance floor with sparkling lights and decorations to give it a classic prom feel. Those that attended were dressed in their best and danced the afternoon away to hits including “Dancing Queen” by ABBA.

Everyone had a joyous time participating. In total, United Way Week raised over $4,000 for the United Way of Olmsted County!

Awards Banquets

Our annual recognition banquets were in October with 133 individuals recognized for their years of service. Of these, 31 were in Houston County and 102 were in Rochester. Two individuals celebrated 40 years of service: Vicki Barry and Wayne Schut.

When it was time to give speeches, there was an ongoing theme of gratefulness to ABC for giving each person the opportunity to find meaning in their work. This is a truly special time to recognize the hard work and dedication that everyone puts into their jobs on a daily basis.

The Lowry aware winners in Rochester included: Michelle Djonne, Wendy Elwood, Nathan Emery, Robert Herzog, Arne Hoven, Chelsea Koop, Bret LeMay, Jeff Lemke, Brad Neil and Dawn Olson. The WOW award winners in Houston County included: Paula Betten, Dianne Gauger, Rick Goetzinger, and Sam Scheck. These awards are given to individuals who have done an exceptional job and reach their goals.

In the Community
Introducing the ABC Positive Support Team! ABC staff from Rochester and Houston County have been attending trainings to complete a three-year Person Centered Practices program sponsored by the University of Minnesota. This program is part of an initiative to integrate person-centered thinking into the direct support workforce across Minnesota. The staff members attending this training took what they have learned and formed the ABC Positive Support Team.

The purpose of the Positive Support Team is to better the lives of the individuals that we serve and the staff that work at ABC by creating a positive and inclusive environment. The vision of this team is that Person Centered Practices are at the heart of our organization and that they are fully integrated into all aspects of ABC. Essentially, this team wants to make ABC the best that it can be for all people who enter its doors.

For more information on person centered practices, visit www.mnpsp.org or www.abcinc.org.

NEW BOARD MEMBER: Leah Holmes

Leah Holmes is a Licensed Psychologist at Zumbro Valley Health Center. She has a Master’s degree from Marquette University. For over 30 years she has provided individual and group psychotherapy, as well as behavior consultation services to persons with special needs and their families. She has worked in a long-term care setting, a transitional rehabilitation program and in an outpatient setting. She served on the Board of Directors of the Brain Injury Association of MN during its formative years and on a number of Boards of service agencies.

Leah believes that each individual is doing the best they can at any given moment in time, and continues to be impressed by the human spirit’s ability to endure, learn and grow.

Presenting the ABC Positive Support Team

STAFF RETIREMENTS

Jamie Nandory
Jamie Nandory worked for ABC for 10 years. She spent most of her time in Extended Employment. Jamie looks forward to spending time with her children and grandchildren and helping her daughter start a new business.

Sherry Noser
Sherry Noser worked at ABC for eight years in various departments, most recently in Abilities Unlimited as a Program Assistant. Sherry looks forward to spending time in her retirement working with the Girl Scouts.

Julia Ramsey
Julia Ramsey worked at ABC for 30 years in various roles, with a majority of her time spent as the Center Based Employment (CBE) Production Coordinator and most recently as the CBE Program Assistant. Julia looks forward to spending time with her children and grandchildren and gardening.

Deb Schulte
Deb Schulte began her career with ABC 32 years ago (actually the DAC at the time) in Caledonia. She started out working as a Job Coach, moving into a Program Coordinator position after a few years and then finally into her role as Site Coordinator. Deb looks forward to traveling in her spare time.
EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Welcome to Employee Spotlight, a new feature of Inside ABC. In late 2018 we asked all of ABC’s direct support professionals to provide brief profiles of some of their amazing participants. Here are the first in what we hope will become a regular feature.

Vicki Barry

After 40 years of working at ABC, Vicki Barry still loves her job. “I couldn’t imagine being anywhere else,” she said in an interview.

Over the years she has been at a variety of job sites, which include: Hy-Vee, Mount Olive and several Inn & Suites locations. For the last five years her primary focus has been housekeeping.

Her coordinator and job coaches say she works hard every day. She keeps her co-workers on task and makes sure to crack a couple jokes throughout the day. Her sense of humor and how much she cares has made her an asset to her job sites.

Congratulations on your 40 year anniversary Vicki!

Wayne Breeser

Wayne Breeser has been successfully employed at the Olive Garden in Onalaska, Wisconsin since July 10, 1995.

For 23 years Wayne has been independently working as a dishwasher with supported employment visits from Woodland Industries.

Wayne works Monday thru Friday and every other Saturday in the dish room at the Olive Garden and is a very valued employee.

Wayne lives in Caledonia with his wife Laura and their new puppy.

In Wayne’s free time he likes to work around their house and spend time with his family.

Keep up the great work Wayne!

Carol Gronseth

Carol is celebrating her 45th year at ABC this year. Carol currently works at Bowlocity, 125 Live, and Ironwood Springs but has worked at a variety of job sites over the years.

Carol is a great worker and takes pride in working at ABC. “I love working at ABC. I am so proud of my 45 year anniversary. I’m not sure when I’m going to retire. You will have to wait and see.”

People that have met Carol are blown away by her sense of humor and vibrant personality. Carol enjoys spending her free time watching the Vikings, Twins, and Gophers.

Congratulations Carol on 45 amazing years!

Tami Sabo

Tami came to Caledonia ABC Works in June of 2013 after completing the School to Work Program.

Tami has two community jobs through ABC Works: at the ABLE Central Office in Caledonia and at the Caledonia Fitness Center.

When not employed in the community Tami works in-center on bolts, collating fliers, shredding, paper separating, folding laundry and custodial jobs.

In her free time Tami likes to swim, eat out, go for walks, spend time with her friends, watch movies, dance and do jigsaw puzzles.

Tami has been a real asset to the ABC Works team for the past five years plus!

TRIBUTES AND MEMORIALS

Dave Keckhafer

Dave was 67 years old when he passed away suddenly on the 28th of November at his home. For 27 years, Dave participated in the Supported Employment Program at ABC and had many opportunities to work in the community and in-center on custodial, recycling and production jobs.

Dave was a model worker who was unique and comfortable embracing his differences and approaching life based on his preferences. He was always upbeat and ready for conversation whenever he had any opportunity. Dave loved to banter and always had a joke to tell or a story to share. Everyone who knew Dave will remember him fondly, with a smile. (Mava Perry).
On the Tee with ABC 2019

The weather outside right now may be frightful but golf really is just around the corner!

On the Tee with ABC, ABC’s annual golf event will this year be held on Monday, June 3, 2019, at The Rochester Golf & Country Club. As always, all proceeds support ABC’s programs and services.

This year ABC is proud to welcome Think Mutual Bank as the event’s Primary Sponsor! Thank you Think for your support!

Contact Laurie or Bethany at (507) 281-6262 for sponsorship inquires.

Event information and golfer registration coming soon!

Help ABC Replace “Henry”

“Henry,” ABC’s electric pallet jack, started his journey in 1985 and has been a faithful worker ever since.

For years Henry has moved pallets that were too heavy for staff to push manually — a huge help to our production operation. Lately, Henry’s age has caught up with him — we are asking for your help to purchase a replacement electric pallet jack.

The total cost of the jack is just under $4,000. We welcome donations in any amount to help ABC offset the cost of this new equipment.

For more information please contact Barrett at (507) 421-3739 or email barrete@abcinc.org.

SAVE THE DATES:
ABC Community Meeting: Tue, Feb 26, 6 p.m. @ ABC, 1911 14th St. NW, Rochester;
ARC Disability Day at the Capitol: February 26, St. Paul; ARRM/MOHR Day at the Capitol: March 12, St. Paul.