New name, refreshed mission, same fiery passion

For the past 64 years ABC has been known as Ability Building Center. With the completion of our rebranding, we will now be known as Ability Building Community as we head towards our 65th anniversary.

In 1956 with the vision of the original founders, 3 staff, and 15 individuals served, ABC began in the basement of Samaritan Bethany nursing home. In 1979 ABC moved into the former IBM building located at 1911 14th St. NW, Rochester where it still operates today. ABC Woodland Industries was established in Caledonia in 1980 with ABC Works opening its doors in La Crescent in 1990. ABC Works Caledonia originally opened in 1972 in a small rented house and moved to its current building in 1978. Throughout the years the organization has grown, today ABC employs 235 staff and serves 747 individuals in Southeastern Minnesota.

ABC continues to evolve with the changing times. We are growing our community partnerships and are transitioning the individuals we serve into independent employment. We are also strengthening our internal contracts and are moving towards more waged positions. While our buildings are always a busy place to be, our rec and leisure programs are also finding new and innovative ways to be in the community.

As ABC focuses on its new mission we honor the legacy of our founders who blazed a new path, breaking down barriers for those with disabilities. Inclusion in all aspects will continue to be a top priority. Our goal is to see that every person we serve is respected and their voice is clearly heard throughout the entire service process. Today’s direction is as strong as it was 64 years ago and we are proud to be Ability Building Community.

Wayne’s Word

Welcome and thank you for reading the ABC Newsletter. I would like to say thank you for welcoming me to the ABC family. I have found that it is a wonderful place to be employed and I believe in the mission to provide services for individuals with disabilities through community inclusion. It is also a place that is filled with people who care and truly enjoy working with the people we serve.

This past year was a year of change as the agency officially became known as Ability Building Community. Signs are changing and you will find the name around the buildings, in the community and on all our new apparel. Although we have changed our name we are staying true to our founder’s legacy. We are committed to making sure that we provide meaningful employment and will ensure that the people we serve are engaged in the community. Thank you for supporting ABC and I look forward to seeing each of you over the next year.
When Steve and Dawn Finne were looking for a location for their business Little Thistle Brewing Company, they had a few things in mind: quiet area, lots of parking, and easy to access. When they found the location right next to ABC, they were excited to have all that plus more.

Officially the partnership between ABC and Little Thistle started when Little Thistle hired an individual to wrap crowlers, but unofficially the collaboration began long before. Dawn recalled that as they were preparing their site, a weekly visitor associated with Ability Building Community. They would stop by, chat with Dawn and Steve, ask for updates, and let them know how excited they were to have them as neighbors offering a connection to ABC. Over time, Dawn and Steve would meet more staff and even be invited to set up a tent at AbilityFest in the summer before their opening. Making the connection with ABC made sense to the Little Thistle staff and owners.

Part of their goal being locally owned is to build community partnerships and support local businesses. Additionally, Steve and Ben their bar manager, both have connections to the disability world. Steve was a physical therapist that worked with brain and spinal cord injuries and Ben worked at a business similar to ABC in Austin, MN.

This connection has since grown. Little Thistle and Ability Building Community have a beautiful relationship. Having an individual wrap their crowler cans has taken 30% off of their workload, both locations exchange parking use during large events, and Celebrating Abilities, an annual fundraiser for ABC is set to be held at Little Thistle for years to come. Little Thistle has also opened the doors for other partnerships as ABC now wraps crowlers for another local brewery.

Little Thistle, from all of us at ABC – We are proud to have you as a community partner and we are even more proud of all you do in our community. We look forward to growing our partnership with such great people!

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**Tributes and Memorials**

**Roger Brown**

Roger started at ABC in 2011 and enjoyed coming to ABC to work with his peers. He was a kind and caring individual who loved to chat about movie collections and recommend great movies to not only his peers but his job coach. Roger had a great sense of humor and enjoyed making the people around him laugh. He was excited about retiring and was able to in November of 2019.

**Laureen Rupprecht**

Laureen spent over 30 years as an ABC employee. She will always be remembered for gentleness with everyone. Laureen enjoyed quiet days, good stories and soothing music as her favorite ways to spend time with her friends. Laureen had a quiet way of making others feel special and appreciated. A quiet soft pat on the top of your hand and a smile from Laureen let you know that she enjoyed spending time with you.
Equal Employment Opportunity

ABC is an equal opportunity, affirmative action, and veteran-friendly employer. ABC provides employment opportunities to all employees and applicants for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, gender, pregnancy, citizenship, national origin, age, disability, military service, veteran status, genetic information, union membership, creed, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, status with regards to public assistance, membership in a local human rights commission, use of lawful consumable products or any other status protected by law.

ABC will not request or require a genetic test or collect or use any protected genetic information from any employee or applicant in connection with employment-related decisions.

This policy applies to all terms and conditions of employment, including recruiting, hiring, compensation, selection, job assignment, promotion, discipline, termination, layoff, recall, transfer, access to benefits, leaves of absences, and training. If you have a question or concern about any type of discrimination in the workplace, you are encouraged to bring these issues to the attention of your immediate supervisor or the Director of HR, Safety & Facilities. You can raise concerns and make reports without fear of reprisal. Anyone found to be engaging in any type of unlawful discrimination will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Affirmative Action Policy

This is to affirm ABC’s policy of providing equal employment opportunities to all employees and applicants for employment in accordance with all applicable laws, directives and regulations of federal, state, and local governing bodies or agencies.

Our organization will not discriminate against or harass any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, familial status, membership or activity in a local human rights commission, or status with regard to public assistance. ABC will take affirmative steps to ensure that all of our organization’s employment practices are free of discrimination. Such employment practices include, but are not limited to, the following: hiring, upgrading, demotion, transfer, recruitment or recruitment advertising, selection, layoff, disciplinary action, termination, rates of pay or other forms of compensation, and selection for training, including apprenticeship. ABC will provide reasonable accommodation to applicants and employees with disabilities whenever possible.

ABC will evaluate the performance of our leadership and supervisory personnel on the basis of their involvement in achieving these Affirmative Action objectives as well as other established criteria. In addition, all employees are expected to perform their job responsibilities in a manner that supports equal employment opportunities.

ABC has appointed our Director of HR, Safety & Facilities to manage the organization’s Equal Employment Opportunity (“EEO”) program. This person’s responsibilities include monitoring all EEO activities and reporting the effectiveness of the organization’s Affirmative Action program as required by law. The Executive Director will receive and review reports on the progress of the program. Any employee or applicant may inspect ABC’s Affirmative Action Plan and information related to our EEO program during normal business hours. Please contact the Director of HR, Safety & Facilities for further information.

Any employee or applicant for employment who believes they have been treated in a way that violates this policy should contact either the Director of HR, Safety & Facilities or any other leadership representative, including the Executive Director. The organization will take immediate action to investigate and address allegations of discrimination or harassment confidentially and promptly.

Thank You!

We were overwhelmed with all of the donations to our Winter Festivities program! Individuals we serve were able to enjoy various activities and learn about different winter traditions. Thank you for your continued support of our programs!

We have received many donations for our end of year appeal toward the ABC Building in Rochester and the Houston County Phone System. We are still accepting donation towards these very needed projects. Thank you for your continued support of ABC!
We’ve been up to snow good...

Back in Business

by Jennifer Cayetano - Employment Coordinator

Lori Nelson walked into Perkins in South Rochester 12 years ago to start her first day as a dishwasher. She thought she would work there forever. In November of 2018, both Perkins locations in Rochester abruptly closed, leaving Lori out of a job. Fast forward one year, Perkins South had since re-opened and Lori began working with me. Within a week, she had the opportunity to interview at Perkins once again. As soon the Kitchen Manager, Matt, saw Lori’s name he knew, “there was no question about re-hiring Lori. She is a rockstar!” Many of her previous co-workers were also re-hired and happy to see that Lori joined the team again! She jumped right back into her duties like she had never left.

Saddle Up with IES

by Lynda Kusciencio - Employment Coordinator

Since coming to ABC 19 years ago, Jason has held a variety of community-based enclave jobs such as custodial work and dishwashing. In 2018, his job was eliminated which gave him the opportunity to work with me to find an independent job placement. After several meetings with questions about what type of work and environment Jason needed in order to succeed, it was clear the path we needed to take to find his right fit. That path landed our hooves, I mean feet, at the door step of Mary Hartman and Pure Form Equine. Jason was hired to help Mary make her homemade horse biscuits (yes, I said horse biscuits). He has found an environment and boss to help him flourish. Mary says, “Jason does quality work, and has a great sense of humor. I see him growing with my company for years to come”. As well as to train new staff, Jason is her first choice to demonstrate how biscuits are made to various professional and business executives visiting in January 2020. Mary feels that “People are limited in their view of what people with a disability can do”!
Lowry & WOW Award Winners

Barbie Graves
Barbie has worked at ABC for just over one year. She has made an impact on so many people. Her positive personality is infectious and leads to a positive work environment for staff and her peers. Barbie works incredibly hard every day and the Lowry Team was proud to present her with this award!

Nathan Meer
Nathan has demonstrated great growth in his communication skills at his job in speaking to customers, asking for additional tasks from his supervisor, and helping his co-workers. Additionally Nathan is positive and pleasant to speak with consistently on a day to day basis.

Mark Oliver
Mark has made tremendous strides in the last couple years. He began working in center with one specific job, since then he was learned to take on new tasks, open up to his co-workers and even began working offsite at Guesthouse! Mark is continuing to grow in his job and enjoys the company of his co-workers and job coach!

Kory Reitvald
Kory goes above and beyond to help in everything possible. He sets the standard in his area everyday with his willingness to do the best work that he can do. His team lead is grateful to have him and looks forward to what the future holds for him.

Stephen (Mike) Richards
Mike has worked at Woodland Industries since February 2008. Mike primarily works at Miken with Woodlands crew. Mike also works at Quillin’s independently with supports from Woodland on Tuesday’s and Saturday’s. Mike is always willing to help out and work at other enclaves when needed. Mike has a great work attitude and is very friendly and positive! When Mike isn’t busy working he is enjoying spending time with friends and hunting. His team is very proud of his hard efforts and devotion to ABC Woodland Industries!

Jay Scored his Dream Job
Jay recently graduated from La Crescent High School in 2018 and was a member of the Lancers hockey team. He started coming to ABC at the end of his senior year and has made a full transition into the work force. He explored a few job opportunities around the La Crescent/La Crosse area. One day while he was on his way to drop off the mail, Jay thought of one place that he wanted to apply to, Sports Hub Bar & Grill. When he went to drop off his application he met the owners and hit it off right away with his vast knowledge of sports. They called back, and Jay got the job! In February 2019, Jay began working 5 days a week in the morning with a job coach. His duties include custodial, stocking and setting up the tables to be used by the many patrons throughout the day.

Jay is becoming more confident and independent at his jobs tasks every day. Jay hopes he will be able to make his own hamburger, and enjoy it with a Spring Grove Root Beer while watching the Minnesota Wild win the Stanley Cup at the Sports Hub. It has been great watching Jay grow and evolve with his new position. Most importantly he reminds everyone to “stay out of the box” (penalty box).
On the Tee with ABC - June 8th
Our Annual Golf Tournament will be held at Somerby Golf Club in Byron, MN. We are excited to welcome back Think Bank as the event’s Major Sponsor.

For inquiries on sponsorships or golfing contact Crystal Heim at 507-535-3693 or visit birdease.com/OnTheTeewithABC

Celebrating Abilities - September 12th
If you missed last year’s Celebrating Abilities, no worries! This is our fall fundraiser at Little Thistle Brewing Company that is free to the public and friendly to all! Come to paint pumpkins, play games, enjoy live music, great refreshments and so much more as we raise funds for ABC!

AbilityFest - June 12th
AbilityFest is a free community event aimed towards showing appreciation to the individuals we serve, their families and staff. During the event we have food trucks, soak your staff, music and more! Join the warm summer fun in front parking lot of ABC in Rochester from 4:30pm-7:30pm!