

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF ABILITY BUILDING COMMUNITY — SUMMER 2023

## Cosmic Corner is open for business!

Experience gained over a cup of coffee

By: Matt Lambert, Comms & Dev Specialist

At Ability Building Community, the programming staff work diligently to find the best jobs possible to fit the interest and needs of our individuals served. The creativity it takes to find unique jobs can sometimes be taxing, but the results are always rewarding. Sometimes a small idea, say a coffee cart, can grow into a part of sustainable programming for ABC and prepare many individuals served for independence and a brighter future.

After two years, ABC has launched Cosmic Corner, a convenience store in our Rochester building that sells various drinks, snacks and apparel. Originally called Cosmic Coffee, the cart was started thanks to a grant from the People's Energy Co-op Grant, Kristen Lynne said.

Kristen, a Lead Day & Employment Services Program Manager at ABC, said having Cosmic Corner offers a type of skill training related to customer service that is unlike anything else we've done before. The idea of growing Cosmic Coffee into Cosmic Corner was fueled by the desire to grow this type of skill training, but Kristen and other staff members realized we'd need more equipment, a professional sink installed, and more items to fully transition. Thanks to the funds raised from the 2022 Year-End Appeal and a grant from the Rochester Area Foundation, the store opened this June and is operational for six hours each day.

Kristen said the skill building at Cosmic Corner is a massive value for those individuals served hoping to join the service industry. The drink preparation, operating a cash register, cleaning, and stocking functions on a day-to-day basis are exactly similar as any service industry position in the community. With the amount of help wanted positions posted around our community, Kristen said ABC can be a real asset to those businesses in having trained, qualified workers fill those roles.

Cosmic Corner specializes in coffee, hot chocolate, smoothies, Italian sodas, and lemonades. The group is always concocting something new and unique behind the counter like the Lunar Lemonade, a lemonade with blue raspberry syrup, and Purple Rain, a smoothie with pomegranate, blueberry and pineapple juice. Cosmic Corner has also started to sell a variety of snacks, sodas, and ice cream treats as well. Kristen said they'd eventually like to start selling more breakfast and lunch food items they don't need to prepare, so individuals served and staff have more options. In addition to drinks and snacks, Cosmic Corner also sells ABC apparel. This change is a welcome one for our staff and supporters, who are always looking for ABC shirts, sweatshirts and hats.

Kristen said she's grateful for the community support they've received through grant funding, our Year-End Appeal, and donors that have supported the coffee cart all the way to Cosmic Corner's opening. Cosmic Corner is open to donations of coffee grounds, whip cream, hot chocolate and various syrups that can be dropped off at our building during business hours. You can also direct your newsletter donation to supporting Cosmic Corner by making a note on the returned remittance envelope.



There's no shortage of creativity at Cosmic Corner. Pictured here is Andrew, who is making a Lunar Lemonade, which is a mixture of lemonade and blue raspberry syrup.



What started with a cart has now become a convenience store. Kristen, Andrew and Laney are among the rotating group of individuals served and staff behind Cosmic Corner.

There will be an open house for Cosmic Corner on August 31 at our Rochester location. The public is invited to see the store, try some of the drinks, and support ABC.

In the short-term, Kristen wants to continue making Cosmic Corner a sustainable, profitable business that helps building our current individuals served. In the long-term, Kristen hopes ABC can secure an external partnership that can prepare food for us to sell, train recent graduates from the Rochester Academy for Independent Living, and even have individuals served sell their own created items in the store.

Kristen said she's seen real growth in a number of individuals served, especially in their day-to-day confidence at ABC. "They take a lot of pride in their Cosmic Corner roles," said about our individuals served. "They really look forward to it each day."

Adapting, changing and growing is the best way ABC celebrates abilities one person at a time.

# WAYNE'S WORD



By: Wayne Stenberg, Executive Director

Welcome to our summer newsletter. In this edition, I wanted to highlight some special training our DEI Committee put together in June. The committee was revived in 2021 under the direction of Cindy Verdick, our HR Director, and Anne Winfrey, our Employment Manager.

The employees at ABC participated in a one-day Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion In-Service that focused on disabilities and culture, values, and unconscious bias. We had speakers from Project Fine, and Fatima Said reminded us that we should not see diversity as a barrier but as a reason to celebrate. She was our keynote speaker and shared her experiences of coming to the United States as a refugee from Bosnia. Project Fine's Katie van Eijl then went over unconscious biases. She looked at how culture shapes our values and how to detect and proactively address our biases. Ben Cockram is an accomplished speaker who shared "Playing the Card Game of Life." We learned about physical disabilities from a firsthand perspective. Ben shared stories from his experiences and how he lives his life to the fullest. We also had a mini film fest with a question-and-answer time with the teams. One big takeaway for the day was the power of belonging.

At ABC, we strive to create an environment where the people we serve can belong while helping them remove the barriers that stop them from having a fulfilling life. Here they will find opportunities, fulfilling career paths, and the ability to succeed. If you are looking for an awarding career, give ABC a try.

We have been creating a welcoming environment for over 67 years and look forward to continuing our mission of providing services for individuals with disabilities through community inclusion.

# LOWRY AWARD

## Bailey Arneson

Bailey came to ABC wanting to find employment and staff helped him get his dream position at Fleet Farm. After starting at Fleet Farm with smaller jobs, Bailey has gotten support from both ABC and Fleet Farm to create more challenging and consistent tasks during his shifts.

Employees at Fleet Farm have raved about Bailey's work ethic and how well he fits in with their culture. Bailey is now learning how to use the Fleet Farm phones to locate items and is able to locate missing items with ease.

Bailey has maintained his position at Fleet Farm for two years and is an exemplary employee. In addition to his positive attitude, Bailey assists customers as needed.



## Deb Prenot

Staff say Deb has become more independent on jobs and keeps track of what jobs need to be accomplished on a daily basis.

She handles a variety of tasks in our Forensics area, like taking orders from the computer and making labels.

On top of her regular tasks at ABC, Deb has taken the time to teach others that are in her department if they have questions. She does an excellent job with quality checking and will rework tasks without hesitation.

# WOW AWARD

## Shawn Clevon

Shawn Clevon is Woodlands Outstanding Worker winner for the 3rd Quarter. Shawn is a very reliable worker and is willing to fill in a different enclaves whenever is needed, Shawn is very willing to help anyone in need. Shawn is able to complete all jobs at Woodland with outstanding speed and accuracy.

Shawn is always in a good mood and puts a smile on everyone's faces with his jokes. Way to go Shawn!



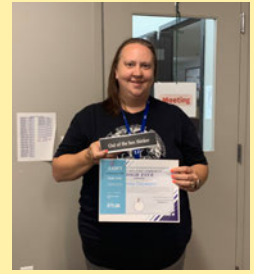
# HIGH FIVE

## Jenny Cayetano

Staff say Jenny goes above and beyond in her job. She is always open and available, even working overnight and weekend shifts to ensure that individuals have the support they need to be successful.

Jenny is also willing to cover for others on the fly. She has a friendly smile and can handle stressful situations with ease.

Jenny is here bright and early in the morning, often before ABC opens and stays after close, when necessary. She is innovative and can think outside of the box when working with a job seeker. She continues her education by completing trainings that relate to being able to give more support to individuals.



## Courtney Whalen



Courtney always brings smiles to individuals faces and is truly passionate about working with them. Her motivation to always do a great job stems from her team. She has created and implemented a new system for time keeping, which has improved our systems and processes for ABC.

Courtney is always willing to help, regardless of her schedule. She also knows every aspect of what we do here at ABC, from programming to payroll. Courtney brings individuals to the corporate office and allows staff to interact with them when they may not have had the chance, otherwise.

She has worked here for many years and she is someone who deserves a reward for all she does and all of her knowledge.

## Dustin Uhlendorf

Staff says Dustin has great attendance and is flexible with his schedule when he needs to be.

He also does a great job taking care of and advocating for the people we serve. Dustin even puts our individuals served needs ahead of his own.

Dustin is a great teammate and works well with his colleagues on a daily basis.



## MEET OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS



### Sherry Irvin

Please welcome Sherry Irvin as one of our newest ABC board members!

Sherry is a native of Rochester and is married and has two grown sons and loves to spend her free time reading, writing, and traveling. She has been a DSP with Cardinal of MN for fifteen years working with individuals with developmental disabilities.

Sherry is an Ambassador with the Rochester Chamber of Commerce, an active member of The Rochester Elks Lodge, The Rochester Exchange Club, and also independently reviews local businesses as well as a published freelance writer. Sherry holds degrees in A.S. in Law Enforcement and EMT – Intermediate.

Sherry currently serves on the Board of Directors for Music Lessons for All, The Rochester Exchange Club, and Veterans Emergency Services Museum and member of SAG to Governor. Welcome to ABC, Sherry!



### Eric Crockett

Our newest board member is Eric Crockett, the Regional Chair – Administration for the Southeast Region of the Mayo Clinic Health System. His role includes oversight of the administrative staff and functions in the region. The sites included in this region include Red Wing, Owatonna/Faribault, and Austin/Albert Lea as well as operations in a number of surrounding communities.

In previous roles at Mayo, Eric served as the vice chair, Midwest Region, for Provider Relations. In this role, he led the administrative structure for the Provider Relations staff and the Mayo Clinic Care Network members in the Midwest.

Additionally, he has served as the administrator for the Department of Neurology on the Rochester campus, working on neurology service line development and integration activities. Eric has also served as director of Radiology and has spent the last 20 years of his career in health care administration, primarily in Radiology.

Eric's undergraduate degree is from St. Olaf College in Northfield and his graduate degree in Business is from the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis. He is an Officer for the MGMA-ACMPE National Board of Directors and has also served as an adjunct faculty member with both the University of St. Francis and Augsburg College.

Eric lives in Rochester with his wife, Amy, as well as three children. Welcome to ABC, Eric!



# IT'S BEEN A BUSY SUMMER

Racing for Abilities  
raises \$56,000!



We are thrilled to announce our Kentucky Derby fundraiser, Racing for Abilities, raised over \$56,000 in May.

The money raised from this fundraiser will go towards programs and services in Houston County!

We'd like to thank our host, Elsie's Bar & Grill. Not only do you have a wonderful establishment with plenty of space, your staff did an incredible job making us and all the attendees feel welcome.

We'd also like to thank Lee Babler for being our auctioneer during our live auction. A special shoutout also goes to The Sundogs Acoustic Trio that still played for three hours despite being down to one musician!

To our donors and sponsors, we feel completely supported by your generosity.

We look forward to growing this event more and more. We hope to see you at Racing for Abilities next year for the Kentucky Derby: May 4, 2024!

On the Tee with ABC hits  
over \$78,000!



On the Tee with ABC was a smash hit! With the support of our sponsors, donors, and golfers, we raised over \$78,000!

We'd like to thank our host, Somerby Golf Club, for assisting us throughout the day and for serving a terrific lunch and dinner.

A special shout out goes to Think Bank, our major sponsor for On the Tee. In addition to being our major sponsor, they also helped run our putting contest!

Thank you to Jess Abrahamson from KTTC for being our emcee and to Aaron Songstad for speaking at our event.

Finally, we'd like to thank our ABC board members, individuals served, staff members and volunteers for helping make our 22nd annual tournament the success that it was.

Save the date for next year's tournament on June 3, 2024.

AbilityFest was  
fun for all!



The weather was warm, the water for Soak-Your-Staff was a little chilly, and the dancing was non-stop for this year's AbilityFest!

AbilityFest, our yearly community event, was held on Friday, June 16 at our Rochester location.

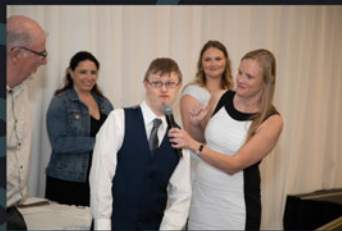
The event was established by ABC Staff that wanted to have an afternoon of fun together with our individuals served outside of work.

We greatly appreciate the planning process by the AbilityFest Committee, especially Tori Gillard, who helped plan nearly all of AbilityFest before departing this Spring for a new position. Tori was one of the creators of AbilityFest and we wouldn't have this wonderful event without her work.

We also want to thank our food trucks: Twisted Barrel Pizza, Flapdoodles and Taco Lab for the delicious food.

All funds raised during AbilityFest will go towards keeping the party going in 2024.

## SAVE THE DATE!



Rochester Banquet  
October 10

Houston County  
Banquet  
October 26



The celebration of our staff and individuals served is back this October!

We'll have more information on how to secure your seat, sponsorship opportunities and more in future digital newsletters.

If you have any questions about our banquets, please contact Crystal Heim at [crystalh@abcinc.org](mailto:crystalh@abcinc.org).

# LEARN SOMETHING NEW EACH DAY

By: Matt Lambert, Comms & Dev Specialist



Sometimes passion can be created in the most random of ways. For Kaye Johnson, she might not have thought taking a summer job while college would've resulted in finding her lifelong passion. But when you ask Kaye, that's what led to her 45 year career in Human Services, including the last nearly 30 years at Ability Building Community.

On June 2, Kaye retired from her Direct Support Professional (DSP) position at ABC. Before arriving at ABC though, Kaye garnered her admiration for the profession while caring for seven boys with developmental disabilities. "It was such a fun experience," Kaye said about her time in Northfield.

There were lots of activities, art and music programs, even a school in the facility she worked in. To help, the individuals at that facility set Kaye on a course that resulted in the rest of her career. And while she hasn't always been in disability services, she found her passion in a short amount of time.

After college, Kaye took a position at the Olmsted County Developmental Achievement Center—now Possabilities—as a Program Coordinator (PC) working on vocational and recreational activities. A former colleague of Kaye had mentioned an open PC position at Ability Enterprises (AE).

The position offered a larger caseload, supervision of more staff and enclave management, so she jumped at the chance to join AE. It was also an appealing position because of ABC's commitment to growing community-based activities and job sites, a role she was to play a massive part in.

Back when Kaye started, there less than 50 individuals served and AE was in the 1500 Building. All these years later, Kaye can't believe how much ABC has grown during her time and hopes it will continue to expand for many decades to come.

For someone of Kaye's experience, her advice is incredibly valuable. It was too difficult to nail just one piece of advice she hopes younger DSPs can learn from her:

- Get to know your individuals, read their file, learn their interests, and understand what motivates them.
- Rely on your colleagues, share information, offer suggestions.
- Keep your eyes and ears open. Each day is a new opportunity to learn more about the individuals, ABC and how to be an effective DSP.

ABC offers an opportunity most occupations don't. Kaye said when given the chance to help someone else succeed and reach their goals, it can also become a fulfilling experience for yourself too. "When you make their lives interesting, it makes your life more interesting. And that is beneficial for everyone." Kaye said.

Kaye said she will be forever grateful for the familial support she's received from ABC over the years. Whether it was needing to bring her daughters in to the office for a bit or time off during a few stressful medical related years when Kaye's kids were younger, ABC was there for her.

We'll miss Kaye tremendously at ABC. She's made such an incredible impact on the lives of so many individuals served and staff. And just in case you were nervous about it: Georgia will still be monitoring the Middle Room for years to come.

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## REMEMBERING RANDY

By: Tony Schultz, Program Coordinator

Randy Michael was a part of the ABC family for 45 years. He started in 1978 and saw ABC go through many changes through the decades.

Randy was a bright spot at ABC. He came in every day, loved the people he worked with and was known for his boisterous laugh. You could say he was a fixture at ABC.

Randy was kind to those around him. He wanted to know what was going on in people's lives and share in that. There wasn't a bad bone in his body. He will be remembered fondly as he exemplified the qualities and virtues we admire in human beings.

Randy had warmth, compassion, caring, and a good sense of humor. If there is one thing that I wish I could do, it's to package this message up in wrapping paper.

His family shared with me that there was nothing Randy loved more than to unwrap packages, no matter what was inside.

In a way, you could say, that is how Randy treated others. It didn't matter what was on the inside, Randy would love you all the same. We will truly miss him.

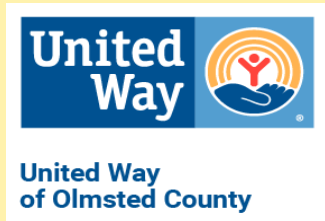




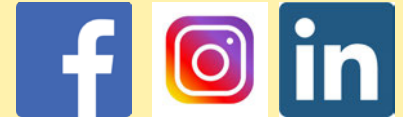
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## SECURE YOUR CELEBRATING ABILITIES SPONSORSHIP TODAY!



By: Crystal Heim, Public Relations Manager

Ability Building Community (ABC) presents our 6th annual Celebrating Abilities fundraiser at Little Thistle Brewing on September 16 from 3-7 PM. We are excited to offer this free, family-friendly community event. Nancy Tobiason-Kramer will provide live music from 3-7 PM during the event, with many activities run by ABC's fantastic staff.

Free community events are an excellent way to reach people who may not know what we do to support the individuals we serve. Events create great awareness, and we may even ignite a passion in someone about ABC.

Now more than ever, community support is needed. While ABC has returned to serving a majority of the over 700 individuals served, many are still on limited schedules and like many others ABC is facing a staffing shortage that has hindered ability to operate services at a full capacity. The support that you have shown in previous years and continue to show will support the programs and services at ABC as we work to support individuals with disabilities through community inclusion. Below are a few ways that you can help us make this a successful event:

### Sponsor

- If you're interested in becoming a sponsor for the event, contact Crystal Heim at 507-535-3693 or [crystalh@abcinc.org](mailto:crystalh@abcinc.org). We have many sponsorship levels this year, so you can choose the type of activity you are sponsoring!

### Donate

- Donate cash to help offset the cost of the event.

### Attend

- Attend the event! There will be many ways to support ABC, including purchasing beverages, participating in the activities, the kids to the kids' corner, and so much more!
- Play Plinko or participate in our meat raffle available at the event.

Please help us continue to celebrate abilities one person at a time!