

Ave news

Published for friends of Avenues to Independence

Fall 2011



Working local heroes celebrated at the musical *Working!*

PJ Flaherty and Matt Palmore (standing), workers in our Recycling Avenue program, were selected to participate in a post-show discussion about what working means to them. Read full story on page 3.

Annual Dinner Celebrates Avenues Workers

More than 140 Avenues participants were honored at our Annual Awards Dinner and Dance on June 24. Dressed in their finery, they celebrated with family and friends and enjoyed good food and dancing to their favorite tunes!

But the focus of the evening was on the work of our participants. With the help of Master of Ceremonies Ron Reeves, four of Avenues' workers shared their very special employment stories with a crowd of more than 400.

We applauded the work tenure of Sergio "Serg" Liwag, who joined the maintenance staff at Maine East High School shortly after he graduated from there in 1989. "I like the people... they appreciate what I do" says Serg. "Everybody in the building knows Serg," added his co-worker and

supervisor Sean Donnelly. "There are many things Serg does for the entire school, that without him, they couldn't get done and certainly couldn't be done as efficiently."

Also on stage were two budding entrepreneurs that work out of Avenues Thrift Shoppe. Lenore Sierzega, aka Lenore's Sewing & Repair, hems clothes, sews on buttons, and takes in repair jobs directly from the Thrift Shoppe customers on Saturdays. With the help of QSPs (qualified service professionals) Amy Hill, Sabrina Edwards and Thrift Shoppe Manager Mike Frustini, her "business" began at the Thrift Shoppe in late spring, and the work has already given Lenore a greater sense of independence.

Laurel Eness is no stranger to Avenues Thrift Shoppe, spending many hours there

(the cash register) Always interested in floral design, she recently began creating centerpieces - "Laurel's Florals" - and prominently displays them in a large curio at the Thrift Shoppe. Laurel told the audience, "I think it's very good that Avenues is supporting us and allowing us to have some money in our pockets."

The story of Stuart Duncan emphasizes the importance of networking and how creating an opportunity can turn into a win-win situation for both the employee and employer. Stuart had worked at Canon USA for more than 10 years before the company moved out of state. He had no job for 18 months. As Ron Reeves explained, "Stuart didn't lose his job - the job lost Stuart." Enter Nick Pontarelli, a guest at Avenue's Love Affair in February. When he learned about our Job Placement program and our urgent need for jobs, he talked to his employer, Larry Roesch Volkswagen in Bensenville, and Stuart was hired to help clean and maintain the dealership. Nick credits Employment Specialist Calvin

Keyes as an "unsung hero who does a fantastic job," explaining how Calvin worked Stuart through the job process for a couple of months, but added that "if Stuart weren't a worthy employee, it wouldn't have worked out."

All the program participants were given a blue ribbon for the great job they're doing, and Ron encouraged the audience to "think outside the box" when it comes to job opportunities for our workers.

To learn more about the accomplishments of Avenues workers and our work programs, please visit our website at www.avenuestoindependence.org. If you have an opportunity for an Avenues worker, please contact Job Placement Manager Randall Smith at 847-292-0870 X 127.



a. Maine East High School supervisor Sean Donnelly displays the award given to the school in honor of their long term support of our Job Placement Program. Participant Sergio "Serg" Liwag, pictured left, has been employed at the school for more than 20 years.

b Chicago Partnership Board member and PepsiCo employee Karen Clarke accepts a special recognition award on behalf of the PepsiCo Enable team. The team recently sponsored a picnic for our residents. (see page 5 for more pictures)

c. Several members of our Suburban Partnership Board celebrated with our participants. From (l to r) are Ed Coyne, Sheldon Kimel, Kathy Korsch, Joel Shoolin, Sandy Pernick, Jim Hornbrook, Marc Blumenthal, and Joyce Christensen.

d. Lenore Sierzega discusses her sewing jobs as MC Ron Reeves looks on.

e. Participants David Blachut and Kevin Healy show off their in-sync line dance moves.

WORKING

A musical based on the book by **STUDS TERKEL**



Gathering in the lobby of the Broadway Theater Water Tower Place are program participants (from l to r) Chris Sawka, Matt Palmore, training counselor Kristin Beusse, PJ Flaherty, Colleen Lynch, volunteer Silvia Campone, Greg Campone, and Avenues Executive Director Bob Okazaki.

Avenues Workers Take the Stage

The inspiring musical *Working* celebrates working people from all walks of life - everyday people working to fulfill their dreams, to make a difference, and to achieve independence. On June 1, audience members at the Broadway Theater Water Tower Place enjoyed not only the performance, but were also treated to a conversation about how those dreams became a reality for some of Avenues program participants.

After the play, PJ Flaherty and Matt Palmore, workers in our Recycling Avenue program, participated in an informative and emotional discussion led by volunteer and founder Silvia Campone, mother of Recycling Avenue participant Greg Campone.

Recycling Avenue, a program of Avenues to Independence, is a free service that recycles small electronic items that are donated in bins placed in municipalities and businesses throughout the Chicago area. Many items are sold through the virtual thrift store they started on eBay. Since they began in 2007, Recycling Avenue has sold more than 2500 items on eBay.

"We focus on our abilities, not our disabilities." according to Silvia.

A video excerpt from the conversation can be viewed on Avenues YouTube site <http://www.youtube.com/user/Avenuesvideos>



On stage! Silvia Campone, PJ Flaherty (center) and Matt Palmore.

Heritage Society Members Honored

In the spring of 2001, the Avenues to Independence Heritage Society was established to recognize and honor donors who have provided for Avenues in their estate plans. Today, more than 40 families have committed future gifts for the people we serve.

Members recently enjoyed a reception and dinner at the Park Ridge Country Club, once again hosted by Fred and Pam Sasser. Fred and Pam have sponsored the dinner every year since the Heritage Society's inception, and we thank them for their continued generosity.

John Kelly, a worker at our Thrift Shoppe, shared insights on his job and how his responsibilities have grown the past few years. "I got good training from the store managers. I help people find things in the store, and then ring up the sale. If people think the price is too high, I say 'make me an offer.' I am grateful to Avenues for having me as a client and for the good job training. I love working at the Avenues Thrift Shoppe."

To learn more about planned giving opportunities and providing for Avenues in your will or estate plan, please visit the planned giving section of our website at www.avenuestoindependence.org, or contact Vice President of Development Michele Shoolin at 847-292-0870 X 116.



Avenues worker John Kelly, the evening's guest speaker, gets a hug from volunteer and proud mother Mary.



We honored new Heritage Society members Sheila Schultz, Jerome Wroblewski (pictured) Joan Wroblewski and Doris Blachut.

New Website Launched!

Thanks to a generous grant from the Sasser Family Foundation, our website www.avenuestoindependence.org recently received a much needed update and went "live" on July 25. The new version is easy to navigate, offers quick sign-up access to events, and will be continuously updated with news, features, and media about Avenues, our programs, and our participants. Special thanks to Collin Sasser, our Chicago and Suburban Partnerships Boards for their valuable content input, and to AdEasel for site development.

Campaign for INDEPENDENCE

At Avenues, the most important thing we do is help people with developmental, intellectual, and physical disabilities live and work with independence and dignity. It's a promise we made at our inception in 1953, and a promise we continue to remember every day.

Recently, that promise has been greatly challenged. The people and families Avenues serve have been put in the middle of the worst economic crisis in Illinois, and their support system and future is at risk.

That's why Avenues initiated the *Campaign for Independence*. The *Campaign* will provide independence and dignity for the people we serve, and greater financial independence for Avenues. The *Campaign* has been carefully designed to help our participants today and well into the future.

"We're building on our own abilities to fund and maintain what we do," according to Executive Director Robert Okazaki. "We want to always be able to deliver the same quality programs that we have been known for since 1953."

Some of the specific goals of the *Campaign* are to expand our employment programs, eliminate existing home mortgages, and enhance the existing residential programs and work center.

The overall *Campaign* goal is to raise \$3.8 million within the next three to five years, and since the kick-off in January 2011, we have commitments totaling more than \$1.4 million. Jerry Feldman, Chair of the *Campaign for Independence*, says, "The *Campaign* is our (Avenues) way of becoming self-sufficient as an organization and also help the people we serve become more self-sufficient. We look forward to serving many more generations to come."

Together, we have the opportunity to do great things.



Bob Healy, Secretary of the Board of Directors, warmly greets nearly 150 family members who came to learn about the Campaign for Independence in April.

From our Executive Director Why We Need the Campaign for Independence



Robert Okazaki,
Executive Director

In the previous *Avenews*, I discussed the lack of a "shared sacrifice" in the proposed Illinois budget for fiscal year 2012, where state-run institutional facilities for people with disabilities were scheduled for raises that would eventually total 5.25% while at the same time, Avenues and other community disability organizations were looking at funding reductions of 6%. I am not sure if Governor Quinn reads our *Avenews*, but on July 1st, he rescinded the institutional increases and restored community funding back to FY 11 levels, less 2% if budget shortfalls are not resolved. While we can't take sole credit for this turnaround, we certainly were one of the many voices calling out for budget equity. After years of unshared sacrifice,

this turn of events was welcome news.

Since 1990, Illinois has provided its institutional system with regular increases while ignoring the needs of community programs. This continued with last year's elimination of all funding for 23 individuals in our supported living program. Despite the turnaround, much work still needs to take place to make up for past inequities and to bring true balance to Illinois' developmental disability system.

In addition, the federal deficit is placing enormous added pressure on Illinois' ability to adequately support needed disability programs. Today, 100% of the state government funding received by Avenues comes through the federal Medicaid program. Discussions are taking place in Washington D.C., to cut \$840 billion in discretionary spending over the next 10 years. While Medicaid would be protected during the initial reductions, the newly named "Super Committee" can recommend reductions that would significantly impact disability supports. Your calls, emails and letters to your congressional representative and both U.S. Senators from Illinois will be important. Let them know that federal funding for individuals with disabilities and their support programs need to be protected during these budgeting processes.

There is no doubt that government, both at the state and federal level, is becoming increasingly unable to support the current and future needs of persons with disabilities. Unlike the 1960's, there will be no wave of funding that allows for creation and expansion of important residential, day and employment services. Both state and federal governments are hoping that Avenues and other disability organizations can just maintain what we have as we work to stave off any future reductions.

Despite this gloomy government forecast, Avenues must continue to move forward and work to meet the needs of more than 220 individuals with autism, cerebral palsy, Down Syndrome and other physical, intellectual and developmental disabilities who look to us for support every day. They expect and require Avenues to be there, regardless of whether or not Illinois or the U.S. is paying its bills.

For this reason, we are embarking on our "*Campaign for Independence*" a five year, \$3.8 million dollar endeavor to help finance the future of Avenues to Independence. Just as we support individuals with disabilities in their quest for self-sufficiency and independence, Avenues is looking to become more self sufficient and less reliant on state and federal funding.

Our goal is to create an endowment that will support the Avenues residential, day training and employment services and to create a fund from which we can maintain our homes and support centers, allowing people with disabilities to live, learn and work in the most dignified, highest quality settings possible.

Given the anemic economic recovery, I have been asked, "is now the best time to be kicking off a major campaign?". The answer is that government funding has already been declining and we cannot afford to lose the time it will take for the economy to be robust once again. Similar to a personal long-term savings plan, the sooner we get started, the better off we will be in five, ten, twenty years, allowing the value of time to work in our favor as we work to provide a secure future for those in need.

As a five year program, donors have the flexibility to plan according to your own personal
(continued on page 5)

Great Things Happen at Avenues!



a. Bill Huening shows he's a true White Sox fan, thanks to the talented face painting by the PepsiCo EnAble Team.

b. Craig Randall displays the t-shirt prize he won playing Bingo. Joining in the fun is PepsiCo employee Melissa Diaz.

c. Kudos to the 13 employees, family and friends (including the canine variety) of the PepsiCo EnAble Team who treated our residents to a picnic, games and a day of great fun!

d. Volunteers from Keller Williams Realty in Park Ridge volunteered their time to give Avenues' Chester House an exterior spring cleaning as part of their RED (Renew, Energize and Donate) Day on May 12.

e. Special thanks to Al Bartel, Ed Coyne and the Park Ridge Rotarians for sponsoring quarterly pizza and movie nights for our participants. Enjoying their pizza are Denise Hacke and Larry Kujack.

f. Participant Jim Kearns proudly displays his catfish "catch of the day!" while fishing with his family in Wisconsin.

Flooding Didn't Dampen Residents' Spirit



Fortunately, Sasser Family House sustained only minor roof damage when a tree fell on the building during a recent storm.

Despite three days without power, flooded basements, and a downed tree that hit the roof of Sasser Family House, Avenues residents "were troopers during the recent thunderstorms" according to Residential Director Floyd Kortenhof. "The storms affected all of our residential facilities in one way or another – some even multiple times," and Floyd credits the staff who quickly provided lanterns, batteries, and other essential items and cleaned the flooded areas. "The staff really shined," Floyd notes, adding that they used other methods to cook, or much to the delight of the residents, went out to eat. Hopefully there won't be more storms anytime soon, but if there are, just like the Boy Scouts, our residents and staff will be prepared!

Generous Support

Avenues is thankful for the generous grants received from the following foundations:

- A. Montgomery Ward Foundation – Two fire sprinkler systems for residences
- Sueske Charitable Trust – support for Recycling Avenue

To Support our Job Placement Program:

- Elizabeth Morse Charitable Trust
- Butler Family Foundation

Annual Report Omissions

We apologize for the following omissions in the 2011 Annual Report:

Campaign for Independence Leadership Committee member Ed Dernulc, Senior Major Gifts Officer for Alexian Brothers Foundation

Chicago Partnership Board member Jason Allcox of Equity Lifestyle Properties.

(continued from page 4)

situation. Gifts are providing monthly, quarterly, annually, one time, converting IRA's and other types of investments to help out in this endeavor. Our goal is to have 100% of everyone who cares about Avenues involved and committed to the campaign.

By contacting government officials, you are helping to preserve existing funding that will provide Avenues with time to achieve long-term success. By participating in the Campaign for Avenues, you are making an investment that will provide untold returns that will secure the future of services for persons with disabilities at Avenues.

23rd Annual Avenues Golf and Tennis Classic - Players Score and Serve Up Big Support!

Despite a weekend of high humidity and record breaking rainfall, more than 120 golfers and 16 tennis players came to the Park Ridge Country Club on Monday, July 25 to support Avenues. They were rewarded with sunny skies, dry turf and cooler temperatures! That evening, 220 dinner guests enjoyed a beautiful sunset from the terrace over cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, and bid on an exciting array of silent and live auction items. But nothing rivaled the support and love for Avenues manifested in the banquet room during dinner.

Perhaps longtime supporter Bill Gorman said it best; "This is a wonderful event, and we're all here in a role of giving. There's nothing better than giving, and we love you all."

A very poignant moment was delivered by Board Member Al Bartel, who announced the dedication of the Feldman Family Garden. Named in honor of Jerry and Susan Feldman for their support of the *Campaign for Independence* (please see article on page 4), the Feldman Family Garden is the landscaped and patio areas separating our two Park Ridge apartment buildings; Herbst Family House and Sasser Family House. Al also cited Jerry's "extraordinary leadership from the heart" as Chairman of the *Campaign for Independence* Leadership Committee.

Jerry and Sue, deeply touched, thanked everyone for "this great honor." Jerry added that "This organization resonates to us, and we're personally inspired by so many others present in this room."

Proceeds from the Classic, which exceeded more than \$50,000, will support our work programs.

Special thanks to Classic Committee chairman Steve Wilson, and his team: Harry Arger, Al Bartel, Ed Barry, John Corthinos, Dave Curry, Craig Dow, Jerry Feldman, Sue Feldman, John Konopinski, Bob Mau, Erin McGuire, Tim Perry, Tony Sivore, Joel Straightiff, Luther Thomas, John Twohy, Rich Vengazo, and Greg Viti.

Visit our Facebook page to view more photos.



- a. Scoring for Success! Special thanks to corporate sponsor MB Financial Bank. From left, first row, are S. McGuire, B. Bartilad, E. Guzman, B. Issleib, K. Holub, and J. Feldman. Second row (from left) are M. Kosiek, D. Fasano, N. Cox, and E. Grove.
- b. The dedication of the Feldman Family Garden was announced at dinner. The garden area, located between the Sasser and Herbst Family Homes in Park Ridge, will be named in honor of Sue and Jerry Feldman for their generous support and volunteer work for the Campaign for Independence.
- c. The red shirts are coming! Thanks to Fred Sasser, there was plenty of red on the green as 20 golfers represented the Chicago Freight Car Leasing Team. From left are Brian Lawler, Duane Bushman, Shirley Bushman, and Dennis Weed.
- d. Good friend of Avenues Albert Wohlbers (left) enjoys a conversation with Board of Directors Chair Jacki Kimel and Executive Director Bob Okazaki.
- e. After a game of tennis, Bob Mau (standing) and friends enjoy cocktails on the veranda. Joining him from left are Barb Bunge, Len Bunge, Mark Walker, and Cathy Harris
- f. Proving that honesty is the best policy, high golf game scorers (from left) Amy Thalmann, Margaret Tower, and Rebecca Michalek show off their prize.



Spotlight on Wine Goes Primitive to Get Hi-Tech

The Chicago division of Avenues Partnership Board invites you to the 7th annual Spotlight on Wine on Thursday, October 6 from 6 to 9 pm.

While sampling six great wines from House Red and tempting hors d'oeuvres from Hel's Kitchen, guests will experience the art and artistry of the Primitive Gallery, 130 North Jefferson Street

in Chicago. The 31,000 square feet showroom contains an unmatched selection of antique to modern furniture and décor, hand-made artifacts, textiles, paintings, jewelry, and gifts from over 100 cultures.

All proceeds will support the development of a computer and activity center at Avenues' work center. The work center consistently provides employment for more than 150 adults with developmental disabilities. A new computer and activity center will provide ways for our workers to develop new job and life enrichment skills, while increasing their quality of life at work and at home.

Additionally, proceeds will benefit recreation areas where the workers can engage in physical activities and games during break times, lunch and down-time. These activities will provide exercise and much needed social opportunities.

For just \$85 you can help make a difference in the lives of Avenues workers. Register on-line at www.avenuestoindependence.org by clicking on the October events calendar. For more information, contact Avenues to Independence at 847-292-0870 X 116.

Get the Scoop for Avenues

On Sunday, September 25 we can have our ice cream and eat it too! Avenues volunteer Lisa will introduce her ice cream creation Comet Soars, featuring peanut butter, chocolate and more at Capannari's Ice Cream. A \$10 VIP ticket includes a tour to see how their ice creams are made, a complimentary scoop of ice cream, and a goodie bag. Raffle tickets for valuable prizes will also be sold during the event. All proceeds from the ticket sales will benefit Avenues, and Capannari's will donate 10% of the day's proceeds from all sales of Comet Soars.



Join us from 1 to 4 pm at Capannari's charming, old-fashioned store at 10 S. Pine near downtown Mount Prospect, just north of Northwest Highway. Check out our website or call 847-292-0870 X 108 for more information.

Help Pave the Road to Recycling at the Fourth Annual Walk-n-Roll

Enjoy a two mile walk-n-roll around Lake Arlington on Saturday, September 17 and support Recycling Avenue as they celebrate their fourth annual Walk-n-Roll. Walking shoes, bicycles, wheelchairs, and baby strollers welcome (no dogs allowed) from 9:30 am to 11:30 am at Lake Arlington, 2201 North Windsor Drive in Arlington Heights. Refreshments, giveaways and raffles complete the celebration. Please bring any recycling you might have! Entry fee is \$10 per person, or \$25 per family. Please register no later than September 5th. For more information or to register by phone, contact Silvia Campone at 847-951-1607.



Saucy Salsa Social Supports Avenues

Seventy friends of Avenues salsaed their way to La Mitad Del Mundo on Friday May 13 for Latin dance lessons, authentic food and cocktails. Muchas gracias to Avenues payroll manager Laura Castro (pictured with her husband Jose) who choreographed the fundraiser. More than \$2,000 was raised to benefit the people of Avenues. Special thanks to Jimmy and the staff of La Mitad Del Mundo Bar and Grill in Chicago for a grande noche!

Board of Directors Welcomes New Members



Avenues warmly welcomes Bonnie Reinhart and Steve Wilson to the Board of Directors, effective August

1, 2011. Bonnie has been very active supporting Avenues, having served on both the Suburban Partnership Board and the Programs and Facilities Committee for several years. Bonnie holds a doctorate in Educational Administration and Leadership, and her professional career has focused on special education.

Steve Wilson, partner of the Wilson Dow Group, has been a member of the Avenues Golf and Tennis Classic Committee for several years, and has chaired the event for the past two years. Both Bonnie and Steve's expertise and caring will be a great asset to our Board.

We are also pleased to announce that Board of Directors member Greg Simmons, will be serving as Vice-Chair for the 2011-2012 fiscal year.

A Fond Farewell

We are very grateful and acknowledge the many contributions from long-standing Board of Directors members Sheila Schultz and Steve Goodman, who announced their resignations. Sheila Schultz joined Avenues Board in the late 1980's, and feels, "I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with everyone involved with Avenues and the individuals they serve. The leaders' commitment to their mission, and the staff members' loving dedication to the developmentally disabled entrusted to their care is an inspiration." We are thankful Sheila will continue serving on the Program and Facilities Committee, and that she will support Avenues activities in any way she can.

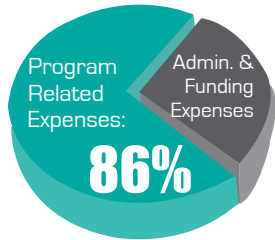
In addition to serving on the Governing Board for many years, Steve Goodman chaired both the Suburban Partnership Board (10 years), and the Business Committee (6 years). Steve believes "the Avenues community represents what good people working together can accomplish. The 50 plus years of growth and service to society stands as a model for our community. I will miss the extraordinary people who run Avenues and many of the clients that have befriended me."



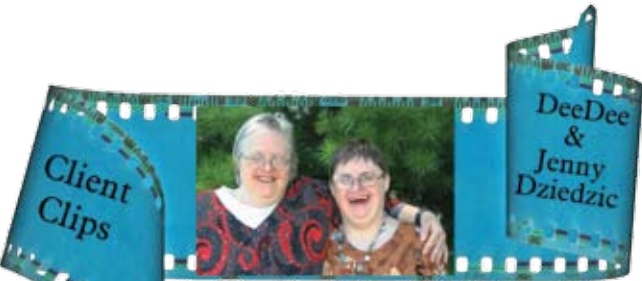
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We are proud that more than 86% of all gifts and donations to Avenues goes directly to our vital programs, and these programs achieve results!



The Dynamic Dziezic Duo!

Double the pleasure and double the fun! That's what Avenues gets from having not one but two members of the Dziezic family in our work and residential programs. Meet siblings DeeDee and Jenny Dziezic. DeeDee has been part of the Avenues family for 30 years, and lives at Herbst Family House in Park Ridge. Jenny became part of the Avenues family in 1998, and lives in one of our Niles townhomes. Despite living in different suburbs, Avenues staff members take them to visit each other, and a favorite pastime is having dinner together, playing games and watching movies.

The girls also see each other every day at the work center in Wheeling. Jenny looks up to her older sister and likes talking to her about what's going on at Avenues, "I like being part of the Avenues family cause it makes me feel good inside." DeeDee calls Jenny "my sweet sister and I always stick up for her." Despite having a lot in common – both like Harry Potter movies and bowling – they enjoy activities with their respective roommates. The girls admitted there is sometimes a little sibling rivalry –DeeDee bowled a high game of 146 to Jenny's 127 – but they consider themselves "pretty close," and we consider ourselves lucky to have both of them at Avenues.

Special thanks to Joe Ropski of Palwaukee Printing for providing color printing of Avenews.

Calendar of Events

- 9/17/11 Recycling Avenue Walk-n-Roll
- 9/21/11 Governing Board Meeting
- 9/25/11 Ice Cream Social
- 10/6/11 Spotlight on Wine
- 10/12/11 Suburban Partnership Board Meeting

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AveNews Fall 2011

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- Chair of the Board Jacki Kimel
- Executive Director Robert Okazaki
- Editor Laura Miles Lockwood,
- Photographers Laura Miles Lockwood, John J. Beusse, Jim Powell

Avenues to Independence is dedicated to putting aside old ideas about what is possible.

We work in partnership with the community to support and encourage people with disabilities to lead the lives they choose. Our success will eventually be measured by how little we are needed.

Avenues to Independence is a non-profit organization providing services for adults with intellectual, physical, and developmental disabilities. All services and employment are provided on an equal opportunity basis. Avenues is accredited by CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities).

