

Avenews

Published for friends of Avenues to Independence

Spring 2011



Thrift Shoppe Provides Training Opportunities

Program participant Laurel Eness learns how to operate the cash register at Avenues' Thrift Shoppe, with help from volunteer Mary Grimes. Read full story on page 4.

Working-it's more than a job



Perhaps no one has written about work more definitively than prize winning author Studs Terkel. In his popular book *Working*,

he says "work is about the search for daily meaning as well as daily bread." In essence, the value of work beyond the reward of a paycheck makes a difference in all our lives, and this is especially true for the people of Avenues.

At Avenues, we put a high priority on obtaining work for our participants and we've been successful because we understand how important work is. We know work helps provide personal independence and preserves dignity. According to Cathy

Kerr, Vice-President of Programs, "Our folks aren't happy without work. It's very important to them; they want to be part of the community and save money."

Work reveals a lot about who we are. Just ask program participant Beth Swiatowiec. She recently found out the hard way how important work is in her life after losing her cafeteria cashiering job – through no fault of her own - when the cafeteria closed down. "It was a shock to lose my job after 13 years" but Beth calls herself, "a hardworking, dedicated team player that will take any job that comes around!" Through her tenacious spirit, and with the help and guidance of Avenues' Employment Specialist Calvin Keyes, Beth hopes to get another position soon.

Beth is one of more than 65 people that are part of Avenue's Job Placement Program, which helps support independence through community jobs in retail, food service, hospitality, and corporations. Unfortunately, Avenues is not immune to these tough economic

times. As we go to press, eight of those 65 people need employment.

Job Placement Manager Randall Smith believes this year has been the most challenging because the entry level job pool is huge – our workers are competing with non-disabled degreed people for the same jobs. But Randall remains very positive, citing our workers' punctuality, stability, low absentee rates and willingness to learn. He believes "Avenues has a special niche in the community, and a lot of our people are underutilized."

The Job Placement Program is just one of several ways Avenues provides opportunities and helps our participants work. Avenues also supports and maintains the Work Center in Wheeling, the Thrift Shoppe in Chicago, and the Recycling Avenue program.

"The Work Center is what sets us apart from so many other organizations that just have activity centers," states Cathy. "Every day more than 150 workers do light packaging



With resumes in hand, worker Beth Swiatowiec gets assistance from Employment Specialist Calvin Keyes entering a job application at a local grocery store.

and assembly work for businesses such as Morton Salt, Claire's Boutique, and NTN Bearing Corporation in our 48,000 square foot warehouse."

When Mike Frustini came on board as manager of the Thrift Shoppe more than a year ago, he not only revamped the store, but made it a great training opportunity for our workers. Cathy adds that the Thrift Shoppe "gives the community an opportunity to meet our guys and learn what Avenues is all about."

(to read more on the Thrift Shoppe see page 4)

Recycling Avenue, which is based at the work center, trains its employees to help communities, schools, businesses and other organizations recycle small electronics. While helping the environment, the program has also helped change the lives of its eight workers, who otherwise had very little hope of finding employment. Workers like Jevan Plummer. As a participant at the work center, Jevan wasn't originally part of the Recycling Avenues team, but he was curious about what the group was doing, and began to spend more and more time with them. So when Jevan was given the opportunity to work on a computer, it sparked an interest and aptitude he never demonstrated before. Through the help of training counselor Kristin Beusse, Jevan recently listed his first recycling item on eBay!

For the people of Avenues, work clearly shows how they can make a difference. Working reveals who they are and in many cases, what they can become.

After all, **working is more than a job.**



Worker Jevan Plummer, beams with pride after inputting an item on eBay for Recycling Avenue.



Community Embraces Avenues' Thrift Shoppe



This gift from a customer says it all.

From the moment customers enter Avenues' Thrift Shoppe, they know right away it's

a special place. The friendly, smiling faces of our participants greet shoppers with a chorus of "Hello" and "May I help you?" and many regulars are addressed by their name. Volunteers note that what's remarkable about these greeters is not so long ago they acted very shy in front of the customers, and had little interaction with them. Cathy Kerr, Vice-President of Programs adds, "If you haven't been to the Thrift Shoppe in awhile, you'll be excited to hear what's going on there. Avenues' program participants are learning, working, and volunteering there too, while preparing for the work place."

It's all part of Avenues' focus to maximize the teaching opportunity the Thrift Shoppe provides. Vice-President of Development Ann Marie Ehrlich calls the Thrift Shoppe "a tremendous asset, and a great way for the community to learn about Avenues."

Much of the credit for the Thrift Shoppe's transformation – both physically and as a learning opportunity for our participants – goes to manager Mike Frustini. He works one-on-one with the participants, and provides situations for them to work to their potential. "I try to give them a sense of the real world, 'a voice,' Mike says, "and now they do every aspect of the business, from sorting and tagging the clothing, keeping merchandise clean and organized, and even challenging the customers to 'make them an offer.' They're a visible representation of Avenues and have given the Thrift Shoppe an identity."

One volunteer given "a voice" is Kelly Doheny. Kelly used to spend all her time in the stockroom, but now assists customers on the floor, and is very proud of her salesperson title. She also works with Nora Prindiville, a new participant to the Thrift Shoppe, helping her learn her job as well.



Spreading cheer at the Thrift Shoppe are from left, bottom row: Cindy Epifano, Kelly Doheny; 2nd row from left: Patricia Nelson, Assistant Manager Susan Schilaci, Laurel Eness, Laura Kaczmarek, Nora Prindiville; top row from left: participant employee John Kelly and Manager Mike Frustini

Long time volunteer Anita Hornbrook says, "It's a joy to see" the growth of the Thrift Shoppe team. Anita often works with program participant John Kelly, who, according to Anita, "Takes charge of what must be done, and is doing so well that he runs the corner store by himself on a daily basis. Our cocoon has turned into a butterfly!"



Volunteer Anita Hornbrook assists participant employee John Kelly with rearranging artwork at the Thrift Shoppe.

The changes have not gone unnoticed by the customers.

Volunteer Mary Grimes, who unabashedly admits she "loves the clients," believes they're "very motivated and relate well with the customers, and the customers in turn are getting a much better understanding about our clients." In fact, a customer was so impressed by their friendliness and positive spirit, she brought over a beautiful cake decorated with the phrase "Thank You For Your Smiles."

So, if you thought the Thrift Shoppe was just a great place to donate used goods and get bargains on clothing, household items, or furnishings, think again. Better yet, stop by the Thrift Shoppe, but be prepared to smile!

Come visit the Thrift Shoppe

Conveniently located at :
7700 & 7710 West Touhy Avenue in Chicago
Open Tuesday – Saturday 10-5, Thursday 1-8
Call 773-631-6230 to volunteer or donate merchandise!

From our Executive Director

Quinn's Disparity in Disability Funding Unfair!



Robert Okazaki,
Executive Director

Earlier this year, Governor Quinn proposed his FY 2012 budget for the State of Illinois. Nobody expected it to be pretty; despite reports that say the recession is over, unemployment is

still high and Illinois has yet to catch up on the millions of dollars in unpaid bills it owes to Avenues and other providers of services.

The Governor focused on budget restraints, reforms and state investments to lower unemployment and to improve economic growth. Spending limits and job creation will be the priorities come July 1. Unfortunately, significant spending limits were imposed on funding for community disability programs.

These days, the concept of a "shared sacrifice" where everyone feels some pain in order to create a better future, is an underlying premise in many government budgets. Illinois purports to be sharing the sacrifice; but when you look at the details, community disability and other human services get more than their fair share of the pain.

Community Developmental Disability services will have their funding reduced by 6% in FY 2012. Any program not receiving federal matching dollars will become extinct and individuals with disabilities who function above a certain skill level will no longer be eligible to receive any state support. No matter that most have had services throughout their lives in order to maintain their independence in the community.

Governor Quinn has forgotten that over the past two decades, community disability services have been disproportionately targeted for funding reductions. When compared to what the state paid its own institutions for disability support services, Avenues and its sister organizations have been shortchanged by over 50%. If Illinois

had kept pace with needed funding, perhaps the idea of a 6% cut could be tolerated. However, a 6% reduction on top of 50% is untenable. The community system is beginning to show declines as a result of the funding disparity.

On average, starting wages in community programs are now 40% behind those of the state. Shortages in nursing and other clinical staff are rampant; prior to the recession, 50% turnover rates in direct support employees were not uncommon. We can thank the recession for bringing those numbers down, but what happens when things do get better? Some analysts predict that in the competition for qualified direct support staff, community developmental disability organizations will be a big loser. Worse yet will be the impact on those individuals with disabilities who rely upon these staff every day.

At the least, one would expect the state to share in the overall sacrifice. However, an analysis of wage increases for state employees working with people with disabilities in Illinois institutions, shows from 2009 through 2012, a total cumulative increase of 14.25% not including individual merit increases. By comparison, Avenues employees have not had any cost-of-living or other general increase since 2006. Staring down the barrel of a 6% funding reduction in 2012, community organizations and their employees will be subject to an "unshared sacrifice" once again.

Direct support and other employment related to the support of people with disabilities is an important, demanding profession that needs to be compensated as well as possible. The state knows it needs to pay well in order to attract and retain qualified staff. The same holds true for Avenues and other community disability support organizations. Since both entities are funded by the taxpayers of Illinois, there must be fairness in funding or an equally shared sacrifice. Neither is proposed in the Governor's FY 2012 budget.

My colleagues have put forth the premise that the funding disparity proposed by Governor Quinn is in direct violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act and other U.S. laws. States are required to provide services in the least restrictive, most appropriate setting for an individual with a disability. Illinois' funding increases for its institutional system and continued reductions to Avenues and other community services is a blatant, discriminatory attempt to limit the choices that Illinois citizens with disabilities have in obtaining a least restrictive, appropriate setting. Historically, Illinois has made progress only under threat of lawsuit or federal sanction. **Stay tuned.**

Save July 25 for the 23rd Avenues Golf & Tennis Classic!

Show off your sporting skills at our 23rd annual Golf and Tennis Classic on Monday, July 25. Join Avenues' friends, Classic Chairman Steve Wilson and his committee for a day filled with great food, cocktails, a silent auction, and more at the Park Ridge County Club. Last year's event raised more than \$50,000 and all proceeds this year will benefit our work programs. Look for your invitation later this spring.



Past Classic Chairman and Avenues Board Member Al Bartel (right) is all smiles as he received his winning raffle prize from this year's Chairman, Steve Wilson.

Great Things Happen at Avenues!



a. The residents of Avenues' Chester House celebrate a Blackhawks' victory, thanks to Partnership Board Members Laura and Glen Amundsen. Pictured from left to right are Louis Kaufman, Allan Rehwinkel, Bill Rogers, friends Gabe Olson-Mendoza, Glen and Laura Amundsen, with Jim Kearns and George Minasian (both in front of Glen) Photo courtesy of Ramon Mendoza



b. Once again this Christmas, Sasser Family House Resident Ed Greenberg spent the day with volunteers Ed and Bonnie Reinhart (Surburban Partnership Board Member) and their family. According to Bonnie, "Ed enriches our lives, and Christmas is extra special with him."

c. Bob Olson and Tim Kelly enjoy a night of bowling at the NADS (National Association of Down Syndrome) Bowl-A-Thon. Bob raised more than \$500 for the benefit.

d. Thanks to Payroll Manager and Mary Kay beauty consultant Laura Castro (standing on right) several lucky ladies received a beauty makeover at Sasser Family House. Laura tries new earrings on Debbie Hopkins.

Love Affair Spends Night in Madrid

More than 250 guests travelled to **A Night in Madrid** at our annual Love Affair benefit on February 19 at the Donald E. Stephens ballroom in Rosemont. The festive evening was filled with flamenco dancing, Spanish music and food, a grand silent auction, raffle prizes and dancing to the Stu Hirsh Orchestra. But the main emphasis was not about Madrid, but right here in Park Ridge for the more than 220 people with developmental, physical and intellectual disabilities that we serve.

So far more than \$100,000 has been raised (donations are still coming in) and this year all proceeds will promote employment for Avenues' program participants. Several workers shared highlights about their jobs, and how being employed provides more independence in their lives. Gracias to all our sponsors, donors and attendees! Visit Avenues' facebook page to see more Love Affair photos.



Love Affair Chair Sue Hopkins (with roses) and her niece, volunteer Amanda Paul, are radiant in red!



Suburban Partnership Board member John Sasser (left) is joined by his wife Leigh and brother Fred, Chair of the Avenues Foundation.



Love Affair major benefactor Clarence Herbst is surrounded by entertainers Ensemble Espanol, who performed their passionate flamenco dancing.



Chicago Partnership Board President Jolene Wise Silverman and Steve Silverman look "muy elegante" for their Night in Madrid. Jolene will be chairing next year's Love Affair on February 18, 2012.

Foundations Support Our Programs

Avenues is thankful for the generous grants received from the following foundations since the last *Avenews* publication:

Hora Family Foundation funded the purchase of four furniture sets for apartments in Niles and Park Ridge.

George M. Eisenberg Foundation supported senior services at our work center.

Deluxe Foundation supported funding for Avenue's programs.

Daniel F. and Ada L. Rice Foundation supported our Job Placement Program.

Million Dollar Round Table Foundation funded purchase of outdoor lighting for Avenues' residences.

Saucy Salsa Social!

You don't have to travel halfway around the world for a terrific Latin experience. Just cha-cha to La Mitad Del Mundo Bar & Grill at 2833 W. Armitage in Chicago on Friday May 13 to enjoy authentic food, cocktails, and music to show-off your merengue, salsa and bachata steps.

Two left feet? Free lessons will have you dancing like the pros in a flash, and you'll be helping the people of Avenues while enjoying a grande noche!

The party runs from 6 – 9 pm; \$30 per person. Watch for your e-vite or call 847-292-0870 X 108 for more information.

14th Annual Irish Fest Breaks Attendance Record

The Luck O' the Irish was definitely with Avenues on Sunday March 13 as more than 300 guests – the largest group ever – celebrated in grand Irish style.

Irish eyes smiled brightly on Avenues as more than \$30,000 was raised to support our work programs. "We were so glad to see so many new faces and lots of familiar ones, along with 60 Avenues' clients and their families and friends," says co-chair Bob Healy. Special thanks to major benefactor, Frank Calabrese, for his generous support of Irish Fest. We also thank the many sponsors, donors, volunteers, guest entertainers and committee co-chairs: Mike and Mary Prindiville, Pat Grimes, Peter and Jeanne Doheny, and Bob Healy and Peg O'Herron, for making Irish Fest another memorable and successful event!

Since its inception 14 years ago, Irish Fest has been a Pot O'Gold for Avenues, bringing in over \$200,000 for the people we serve, and that's no blarney!

Photos from Irish fest can be viewed on Avenues' Facebook page.



Left Photo: Cead Mile Faighte (one hundred thousand welcomes!) to new Irish Fest Co-Chairs, Jeanne and Peter Doheny.

Right: The pipes called to Co-Chair Bob Healy, who performed a stirring vocal of Oh Danny Boy while accompanied on the violin by his granddaughter, performance arts major Megan Healy



Participants Ellen Moore and Rick Kryder are festive in their green derbys.



Displaying intricate Irish step movements are members of the Weber Dance Company

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Campaign for INDEPENDENCE

Working for independence...assuring dignity; it's a promise that means so much at Avenues.
Coming soon, the *Campaign for Independence* will help secure our commitment to the people we serve.

Client Clips



PJ
Flaherty

PJ Flaherty

When Patrick "PJ" Flaherty earned his associates degree from Harper College in 2006, he naturally thought he would find employment, but he soon discovered there weren't many job opportunities for full or even part time work. That changed when Recycling Avenue was born three years ago. Since then, co-founder PJ has helped recycle hundreds of used phones, computers, and monitors received from the bins they set up at local municipalities. PJ feels a strong sense of accomplishment in his role of protecting the environment and being productive. PJ is also proud of the nearly 2,000 household and electronic items they have sold on eBay throughout North America and overseas. His goal is to improve their recycling and eBay services, yet maintain the same level of quality; "I want to keep the momentum going and improve upon it." PJ especially likes the teamwork Recycling Avenue provides; "It's very collaborative, and I've made a lot of friends coming here." PJ takes the Pace bus from his home in Palatine to the Wheeling Work Center three days a week. When not working, the die-hard White Sox fan enjoys all sports, movies ("Blues Brothers" is one of his favorites) and plays video poker games with Greg, although he adds jokingly, "I always lose to him."

But in our book, PJ and the Recycling Avenue program at Avenues is a win-win situation!

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

Calendar of Events

04/13/11	Suburban Partnership Board Meeting
04/19/11	Chicago Partnership Board Meeting
05/13/11	Latin Night
05/18/11	Governing Board Meeting
06/24/11	Annual Awards Dinner & Dance
07/25/11	Golf & Tennis Classic

Visit Avenues on Facebook!

AveNews Spring 2011

Published three times a year by
Avenues to Independence,
515 Busse Highway,
Park Ridge, IL 60068; (847) 292-0870.
www.avenuestoindependence.org
Circulation 4,500.

Chair of the Board
Executive Director
Editor
Photographers

Jacki Kimel
Robert Okazaki
Laura Miles Lockwood,
Laura Miles Lockwood,
John J. Beusse, Ray Doud

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 developmental disabilities. All services and employment are provided on an equal opportunity basis. Avenues is accredited by CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities).