

The Competitive Edge



BCRC, Inc.
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Spring 2023

It is the mission of the Beaver County Rehabilitation Center, Inc. to provide the opportunity for growth and independence while respecting the dignity and uniqueness of each individual.

Polar Plunge Raises Money and Builds Team Spirit

by Frank Shialabba

BCRC helped raise \$1,099 to benefit Special Olympics as a number of clients and staff participated in the Polar Plunge this past winter.

Executive Director Lesley Hallas believes in the value of involvement in that she states, "We have numerous participants who participate in Special Olympics. The financial donation will go toward supporting their events. Additionally, our presence affirmed the priority BCRC and our staff place on the value of organizations that support and provide opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities."

Individuals from BCRC who bravely plunged into the river in West Bridgewater include Lesley Hallas, Jonni Kichta, Rodney Brown, Ryan Zagorski, John Baumgardner, Krista Peace, John Palmer, Heather Mondak, Katie Wisniewski and Natalie Montgomery.

Board President Joe Martonik, along with our participants and staff from CenterPlace, the Production Center and WIN Services came to cheer on the team. In addition, students from the School to Work Program participated in the opening ceremonies and throughout the event.

Ms. Hallas believes that, along with community service, this was a valuable experience in teamwork and bonding. She states "The event provided an incredible team building opportunity for BCRC staff, participants and the president of our board. It allowed us to learn about one another personally and connect outside the normal work environment." Ms. Hallas feels that the Polar Plunge will be an event that BCRC will look forward to every year.



Bailey is Bundle of Love for Clients and Staff

By Frank Shialabba

A joyous, happy feeling has entered the lives of BCRC participants and staff in the form of a curly haired, golden/beige mini golden doodle named Bailey. Bailey is BCRC's new therapy dog in training and is owned by Facilities Manager Laura Medarac. Ms. Medarac states, "I got Bailey when she was 12 weeks old. It wasn't long after that I realized that she was something quite special. She was such a gift and I felt that she needed to be shared."

Bailey is nine months old, and she has finished her basic obedience puppy training and is working towards her AKC S.T.A.R. Puppy certification. That certification will then lead to her Canine Good Citizen Certificate and then her Therapy Dog certification.

Bailey's benefits to our participants and staff have exceeded even Ms. Medarac's expectations. She says, "Both participants and staff have embraced Bailey from the first day she was here. When Bailey visits, you can actually see the physical and postural realization in people. Participants and staff smile and tell me that just seeing her makes a good day better and a bad day less stressful." BCRC clients stop in Ms. Medarac's office if they are having a bad day or if something difficult is happening in their lives. Bailey instinctively knows to go and sit with them and give them comfort. There is actually a "Team Bailey" in the Production Center, and she is the mascot.

Bailey and Ms. Medarac try to spend some time at all of BCRC's three locations. Aurora participants like to hold her in their lap for a moment of calm. Often people, who are normally closed off, open up when they see Bailey. According to Ms. Medarac, "Bailey has really managed to bring people together."

Bailey looks forward to "going to work" each day. Ms. Medarac says, "Come, let's go see your people." Bailey hops down quickly and runs to the car with tail wagging.

Bailey continues her training for her "job" at BCRC. She is learning to deal with distractions, walk through a crowd, keep the correct pace, come when called and a whole host of other commands and duties. According to Ms. Medarac, "she enjoys every moment of it."

It is obvious that the participants and staff enjoy every moment of Bailey's time with them. She is a bright, golden bundle of fur and love for everyone who interacts with her.



Edder Promoted to Job Coach Supervisor

By Ian Thomas

Career educator Rich Edder was recently promoted from his position as job coach to job coach supervisor in the Production Center.

In addition to his work experience here at BCRC, Rich brings extensive career experience as an educator. Rich taught in the classroom for 23 years and acted as an elementary school principal for eleven years. In addition, he has taught at the college level and coached four different teams over the course of his career. He states, "Much of what we do here is related to instruction. Having the ability to listen, follow directions, be flexible, and encouraging to others are all things that crossover into many fields. I have always attempted to be detail oriented and working here requires the same level of effort."

In his new role, Rich hopes to continue the instruction of participants, a practice he began as a job coach. "Recently I prepared and taught two classes celebrating Black History Month. I have also taught classes on weather preparedness, math concepts, and science concepts such as shapes, animal adaptations, and motion," he says. Rich's ideas for future class content include literacy and holiday themes.

Rich holds the honor of being a member of three different Halls of Fame: Freedom Area Gridiron Greats, the Westminster College Towering Titans HOF, and the Freedom Area Educational Foundation HOF. He views his success as the result of people investing their time and support in him along the way. He views his own coaching in a similar light. "I just thoroughly enjoy watching others grow," he says.

Determination Pays Off For Ted Rita

By Frank Shialabba

After overcoming numerous obstacles, Ted Rita is living his dream of working at a job in the community at the age of sixty-two.

According to WIN Services Director Jonni Kichta, "Ted was determined to work at a community job. Retirement was not something he considered. He has overcome a serious health scare, being hit by a car, and the doubts of others to secure community employment."

His health scare and the pandemic derailed two previous work experiences, but Ted was determined to come back strong. Ted has proven to himself and others that he can work successfully. According to Ms. Kichta, "He has a strong work ethic. He has shown growth in his work pace and focus." In addition, Ted has excellent attendance and a take charge attitude at work.

Ted states, "I love my job and it makes me feel proud." That pride is reflected in the fact that he likes to buy new clothing and dress professionally.

Ted also takes pride in helping others. He volunteers on a daily basis at the local food bank, where he is one of the most experienced helpers. He also enjoys taking long walks in Beaver and socializing at local businesses. Where others may have given up, Ted has shown the value of setting a goal and maintaining the determination to achieve it.





Midon is Integral Part of BCRC

By Adam Loverich

Donald "Donnie" Midon, has longstanding connections at BCRC, where he brightens the lives of others on a daily basis.

Starting at BCRC in 1985, Donnie has been an integral part of our agency. He worked competitively for a short time in 1997, but his strong connections to BCRC brought him back to the agency where he missed the comradery and his peers.

Each morning, Donnie is able to check in with his job coach, grab needed supplies/materials, and begin vacuuming the array of carpeted areas and throw rugs located throughout the building. Donnie is very task-minded and routine-based. When asked, Donnie said that he really enjoys operating the vacuum cleaner and completing trash duties. Donnie puts a smile on everyone's face as he progresses through his cleaning routine in the CenterPlace location. Donnie is often overheard conversing with his peers or greeting staff, in his own unique, and personalized way for each individual. Oftentimes, his infectious laugh will fill the hallways as his sense of humor brings many candid moments of chuckling to those he is around.

Donnie has had many different work experiences during his BCRC journey. He participated in transitional work sites, such as Good Samaritan Enterprises, Applied Concepts, Sensibility Soaps, Pizza Hut, and has been a part of the laundry crew at the Medical Center. Currently, Donnie's passion is being a part of the in-house janitorial crew.

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IT Administrator's Impact Will Be Felt For Years

By Frank Shialabba

"My computer's not working, where's Sean?" These words were often heard during IT Administrator Sean Sen's 17 years of dedicated service to BCRC. It was with mixed feelings that Sean retired April 28, 2023 from a job where he gave his all.

Sean began working at BCRC as a DCI intern in 2006, and it was obvious that he had the drive and intelligence to be an excellent IT administrator. Sean has proved his value to BCRC many times over, through his ability to deal with the kind of IT emergencies that can cripple an agency and with his talent at implementing new technology. Not only is Sean knowledgeable in his field, but he also has saved BCRC thousands of dollars through his skill in negotiating with vendors. During the pandemic, Sean worked tirelessly to ensure that staff could work remotely from their homes.

Sean's value is lauded by Director of Business Operations Michael Gaguzis who states, "Over nearly 17 years of service Sean has supported BCRC through significant growth, seeing the number of staff more than double." In addition the agency has grown from forty generic computers to hundreds of networked PC's, and from two servers to five servers and four virtual servers. As BCRC has grown, so have the demands on the IT administrator. Sean has handled these demands in a way that has allowed BCRC to grow and prosper. Gaguzis states, "Sean's indispensable work ethic contributed to the success of the agency. He was always ready to take on a challenge, and it was his priority to meet the IT needs of staff." Executive Director Lesley Hallas concurs stating, "Sean made himself available for employee needs 24/7. He gave above and beyond the duties of his job description, always willing to assist in whatever capacity was needed. He will certainly be missed and his impact will be felt for years to come."



Sean wishes to extend his thanks to the BCRC staff for "your help, support and creativity along the way." He states, "I have enjoyed my time (at BCRC) and you (the staff and clients) have been a part of that. I have enjoyed working with you and getting to know you. Thank you for all that you have done for me and with me, and for continuing to make BCRC shine."

Sean expects to be busy in his retirement. He hopes to catch up on projects around the house, visit his grandchildren and travel to Turkey. He also has an open invitation to BCRC's retired men's breakfast group and the once a month lunch group.

Everyone at BCRC wishes Sean a happy healthy retirement, and we extend our thanks for his years of faithful service.

In the Spotlight

JEANNE DUSCHEK



Jeanne Follows Her Dreams

by Kristina Beal

Inspired by her mom and sister, who work in residential services, Jeanne Duschek is following her dreams by working as a WIN Services employment specialist. Duschek has worked at BCRC for three and a half years. Her previous experience was as a stay at home mother and dental office assistant. Duschek now serves adults in the community by assisting each person with their individual goals, such as daily living skills, money management, community awareness and employment support.

Her supervisor, Jonni Kichta (Manager of WIN Services) reported "Jeanne is an extremely hard worker, with great attention to detail and a wonderful ability to bring out the best in others. She sets expectations for individuals to strive for and meet, while offering them support all along the journey to success."

Duschek stated she "loves getting to know the participants by learning about them and helping them grow successfully in the community." Duschek said she has personally grown in patience and understanding by working at BCRC. She finds it "so rewarding to help the participants achieve their goals." Outside of work, she enjoys spending time outdoors swimming and hiking with her family and pets.



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Lesley Hallas

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School To Work Program Hosts Transition Council

By Mary Jo Sanders

BCRC's School to Work (STW) program hosted teachers, school administrators, representatives from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and other guests for the Beaver Valley Intermediate Unit transition council meeting at our BeaverPlace location this past October. The transition program helps students adjust to life after their school years.

STW students used their time and talents to prepare and serve refreshments and decorate the meeting space. The students also crafted ornaments for each attendee to take home.

A number of STW students and staff gave presentations at the meeting. Traci Hughes, manager of Youth Services, spoke to the crowd explaining how the STW program works and Rodney Brown, coordinator of transition specialists, gave a brief history of BCRC. Staff members Heather Mondak and Katie Wisniewski talked about job shadowing opportunities and pre-employment classes. Four students spoke to the assembled crowd about their experiences with the STW program. Polina Shannon talked about working at the Beaver Supermarket and Michael Ramaglia discussed his experience as a seasonal worker with Fed-Ex. David Bedekovich spoke about attending BCRC's summer extended school year program and Laniece Smith talked about learning life skills. Their teachers and job coaches were extremely proud of the fact that they were able to speak so eloquently and share their personal stories.

STW has shown much growth in the past few years, and by hosting this event and showing what they have to offer, they have added students from the Ambridge and Moon Twp. districts. STW has also had inquiries from a number of other schools.



Employee of the Month

Cody Fabyanic
 Dec 2023



Charlie Beckinger
 Jan 2023



Amy Kochanowski
 Feb 2023

