

BCRC School to Work Opens Career Café

by Traci Hughes and Katie Wisniewski

Recent grants from Baden Walmart and Constellation Energy have enabled BCRC's School to Work (STW) program to open their new Career Café.

This student led initiative, inspired by the success of several local Beaver County high schools, incorporates both life skills and vocational skills. Students bake food items to sell, design café menus, take customer orders, serve food and beverage items, and work the cash register. They develop vocational, life, and math skills.

Students "earn" career cash while attending volunteer and assessment sites in the community. They can then use their career cash to purchase items within the Career Café.

School to Work's long term goal is to open the Career Café to WIN Services' clients, BCRC staff, and possibly the parents of current STW students as a way to fund the Career Café program in the future.

Students recently hosted a meeting of the local Beaver County Chamber of Commerce at the Career Café. They gained valuable experience planning and serving the public at this event.



Georgia Achieves Her GED!

By Adam Loverich

Georgia Certich, a participant in BCRC's Paid Work Training Experience (PWTE) received her GED diploma on October 4, 2023 after working hard for two years. Georgia understood the importance of obtaining her GED for future vocational success.

To celebrate Georgia's accomplishments, a graduation ceremony took place on October 10, 2023. Georgia was surrounded by her peers and staff members as she was the focal point of the ceremony. Many PWTE participants beautifully decorated for the event. Georgia marched in



to *Pomp and Circumstance*, and she, along with the audience, rose for the playing of the National Anthem.

Master of Ceremonies, Adam Loverich, School to Work Manager Traci Hughes, BCRC Executive Director Lesley Hallas, Aurora Services Manager Melissa Coakley, and BCRC Job Coach Supervisor Rich Edder, all participated in the event.

Georgia expressed her appreciation for everything that the staff at BCRC had done for her. She said, "If it wasn't for BCRC, I probably would have never gotten my GED."

Talent and Work Ethic of Kris Beal Recognized

By Frank Shialabba

BCRC employee Kristina Beal's talent and dedication were recognized when she was promoted to quality assurance specialist, effective May, 2023.

Kristina's main goal in her position is to ensure the highest quality services for BCRC participants. She states "I plan to do this by collecting and communicating performance data, researching and staying up to date on regulations and compliance needs, and offering potential solutions that will allow agency staff to make informed decisions."

Kristina has been employed at BCRC since 2016, and previously worked as a program specialist. She credits BCRC with "opening doors" that allowed her transition to her new position. Executive Director Lesley Hallas initially offered her the opportunity to complete a grant writing course. She then worked with Ms. Hallas to develop new grant opportunities. Ms. Hallas recognized Kris' natural intelligence and work ethic, and Kris was ultimately rewarded with her new position. She states, "As a program specialist, I found myself naturally inclined to study new regulations and bulletins sent out through ODP and BCRC's policies and procedures. I would often collaborate with the other program specialists and managers to update departmental procedures as needed and as efficiently as possible."

Kristina has a Master of Science in General/Experimental Psychology from Morehead State University. She previously managed an experimental psychology lab for her thesis, served as career counselor, and was a graduate assistant for an experimental research and design course. In her spare time she was a teaching assistant for a child with autism.

Kris obviously has a love for individuals with disabilities along with her many administrative skills. She feels that she has been able to establish relationships with participants and staff, and that gives her first-hand knowledge of BCRC programming and participant needs.



BCRC Participants Learn Animal Safety at Annual Event

By Ian Thomas

BCRC participants and staff enjoyed new programming during the annual safety day in September. The purpose of safety day is to allow staff and clients to receive their required annual bloodborne pathogen and fire safety trainings prior to the annual expiration date.

New to this year's programming was an emphasis on animal safety and animal therapy. Michael Cunningham of training service Two Dads and a Dog presented instruction on the subject of dog behavior and safety. In addition, Animal Friends brought two new dogs from their Therapets program to visit with staff and clients. "The Therapet teams were: Pixie Sohn with McKay and Mary McMahon with Bobcat. According to Facilities Manager Laura Medarac, "The guests were incredible with all the clients."

Other highlights included pepperoni rolls for lunch, prize raffles, and the addition of a "Put Out the Fire" dunk tank game in which clients were invited to throw beanbags at a target to pour a bucket of water onto the heads of (brave) staff members.

Facilities Manager Laura Medarac coordinates safety day and strives to make it enjoyable for all involved with a catered lunch and fun activities. "I have been involved with organizing safety day since 2014. I am so excited when I can look around and notice all staff and clients engaged, having fun, and smiling!"



Polar Plunge is Just Ducky

By Mary Alviani

Come join the fun on Saturday January 27th, 2024 at Bridgewater Landings Marina for the Polar Plunge! This event benefits Beaver County Special Olympics. Participants jump into the frigid waters of the Beaver River to support the athletes of Special Olympics.

Join BCRC's team by using this link:
<https://specialolympicspa.org/beaver-county>



You can join at any time! Plungers commit to "Freezin' for a Reason" and raise a minimum of \$50 to participate. If you do not want to plunge, you can still help sponsor BCRC's team by donating using the same link, and/or coming to cheer on individuals and teams. The first plunge begins at 12:00pm.

There will also be a rubber duck race before the plunge begins, presented by the Grumpy Beaver Pub. You can buy one or more ducks on the website. Each duck has a chance to win 50% of the overall prize if their duck wins the race. The other portion of the prize benefits Special Olympics Beaver County.

Visit the link above for more information.

Save the date to be part of this great event!





Madison is Dynamic and Giving

By Frank Shialabba

Madison Mercadante, age 27 of Monaca, is a dynamo who works hard, smiles often and gives to her community.

Always looking for a challenge, Madison recently left a job where she had worked successfully for a number of years. While helping Madison look for a new job, WIN Services did a thorough assessment of her current skills and interests. They found that she had grown considerably in confidence and ability, and she was more than ready to take on new responsibilities.

WIN found Madison a position in the retail clothes industry that involved a number of new skills and a great deal of flexibility. At her new job, Madison works as a stock associate, unpacking and organizing clothes and bringing the clothes to their correct areas on the sales floor. WIN Program Specialist Madeline McGee states, "I'm proud of how much she has been able to learn. She is doing a lot of jobs that she has never done before and she does them well. Madison's employer likes how flexible she is. She does whatever they ask."

Madison's people skills are also exemplary. She states, "I love my job and the people are great." Ms. McGee feels that "Madison is always cheerful and friendly. She's always smiling, gets along with others and is ready to help."

Madison's desire to help carries over to her personal life. She volunteers at the local food bank and at World Vision. She also bakes food for the bakes sales at Pathway Church in Chippewa.

When she's not working or volunteering, Madison enjoys being active with friends. She likes shopping, bowling and basketball. She also spends time communicating on her phone and through social media.

Madison exemplifies BCRC's motto as she loves to "be part of something." She is an active part of the work force and her community, always giving, communicating and caring.

National Popcorn Day
January 19th



Friends Helping Friends Raises Record Amount

By Mary Jo Sanders

BCRC raised \$960 in the annual Friends Helping Friends sale at Boscov's this October; the most money raised since BCRC has participated in the event.

Each year the staff raise money for our Client Christmas Gift Fund, which provides each participant with a special Christmas gift from staff along with a gift from the agency, itself.

BCRC has participated in the event since Boscov's opened at the Beaver Valley Mall in 2006. We sell the passes for \$5 each and the bearer of the pass receives 25% off most of their purchases for an entire day. Boscov's offers great sales that day even before the additional savings, and they open for extended hours.

BCRC sold a record breaking amount of shopping passes this year! Our employees purchased 105 passes totaling \$525. Boscov's also let us set up a table to sell passes to customers walking into the store. Executive Assistant Sue Leiper started the morning off strong and then several WIN participants and staff members worked the table, selling an additional \$435 worth of shopping passes!

We are so thankful for Boscov's continued dedication to non-profit organizations in Beaver County!



In the Spotlight

JOHN PALMER & JODI HALLER

By Kristina Beal



Employment Specialists John Palmer and Jodi Haller have supported WIN Services participants for over 10 years. Their jobs are to help participants learn daily living and employment skills and grow in the way they think and present themselves in the community.

The pair have shared many laughs, met good, caring people, and learned a lot over the years. They have expanded their comfort zone and adapted to changes as a team including three building changes, using technology, transforming habilitation services, floods, the pandemic and staffing changes. One constant for Jodi is her passion "to be around my co-workers and clients." She enjoys "helping the clients grow, stay active and make healthy decisions."

John and Jodi both look forward to the annual Christmas party that "brings everything together."

John expressed "It has been a treat to look forward to going to work each day...somewhere that is more than a job." His goal is to "grow more within my department and stay focused on those I serve".

Jodi said her goal is simply "to become a better person every day".

Manager of WIN Services Jonni Kichta described John as someone who "recognizes details and leads by example. He has special handshakes and interactions with each individual." Jonni described Jodi as an encourager, who goes above and beyond and "our strongest advocate for those she serves and works alongside."



BCRC's "Voice in the Sky" is Newest Board Member

By Lesley Hallas

The 15 members of BCRC's Board of Directors are looking forward to welcoming Frank Shialabba as the board's newest member. Yes that's right, our very own "Frank Shialabba", the voice in the sky at BCRC's annual softball game is joining the Board of Directors!

Frank was employed at BCRC for 43 years and retired as project director in 2013. Frank continues to volunteer his time and share his talents with BCRC, managing and writing in BCRC's newsletter. Frank lights up when thinking back on his time at BCRC, stating "I always felt that you could never 'give back' when working with the participants, because they always gave you more than you gave them." Frank brings with him a deep historical knowledge of BCRC, having professionally grown with the organization as new programs were developed and others expanded.

When Frank was asked what excites him about the opportunity to serve BCRC and its participants as a board member, Frank said "I was eleven when I saw a person working with individuals on a TV program and I felt that, that was the best job that a person could ever have. I still feel that to this day. That is why I am excited about the opportunity to be on BCRC's board, and to be involved in seeing BCRC into the future. I think that BCRC has a bright future with our wonderful participants and staff, an energetic new director and exemplary programs."

Frank looks forward to serving alongside his fellow board members, who each bring with them a vast array of professional backgrounds and expertise to further support the achievement of BCRC's mission. Frank's commitment and genuine passion and care for the individuals and families served by BCRC make him the perfect candidate to be welcomed on to the board.

Executive Director

Lesley Hallas

BCRC Board of Directors

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- Tracey Antoline-Patton, 2nd VP
- Jan Kaminski, Secretary
- Lucas Rihely, Treasurer

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The board and leadership of BCRC look forward to the impact his involvement will make.

"There is no other agency and no other group of people that I would rather serve" said Frank. BCRC was proud to call him an employee for 43 years and we are now elated to call him a board member!

Winners of the Month to be Featured

By Frank Shialabba

WIN Services announces the "Winner of the Month", an award that will honor WIN participants who shine "above and beyond" in their daily lives.

WIN Service Manager Jonni Kichta states "We want to honor WIN participants who exhibit outstanding performance in the area of work or community service. We feel that it is important to recognize individual growth and the giving spirit that many of our participants exhibit every day."

WIN Program Specialist Madeline McGee echoes those sentiments, and believes that "We have many individuals who are exemplary in their contributions to work and the community."

Winners will receive a gift card, and will be featured as "Winners of the Month" in the Competitive Edge newsletter.



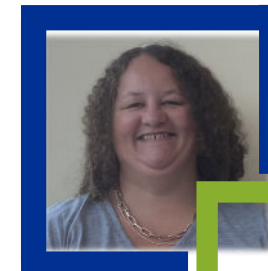
"All you need is love. But a little chocolate now and then doesn't hurt."

- Charles M. Schulz

Happy Valentine's Day February 14th

Employee of the Month

Justina Yothers
Sep 2023



Abby Coulter
Oct 2023



Chris Piper
Nov 2023

