

The BEACON

December 2011



"A new beginning"

Anniversaries in December

Congratulations

to all of you who have
been here for 5 years
or more!

Donald Andresen	19
Shirley Porter	16
Ronald Porter	16
Sherrri Pierce	15
Steven Vogt	13
Lorrie Nelson	13
Ahren Michelbook	12
Brenda Halvorson	12
Joyce Swenson	11
Brenda Brunner	11
Amber Felton	11
June Knudtson	9
Judy Markow	9
Sally Jerome	9
Nicolette Coss	9
Candace Kapperman-Wolf	9
James Petroske	8
Ann Stevens	8
Carol Miller	7
BethAnn Peper	7
Kami Ayers	6
Mark Turnbull	6
Michele George	6
Robin Coppock	6
Afton Simpson	6
Beverly Posta	6
Deborah Bowman	5
D. Byron Hopke	5
Cindy Bradford	5
Wayne Tuchalski	5

CEO Corner

by Dave Barnard

Knowing this issue of The Beacon is being released just after Thanksgiving, I'm hopeful that you all had a great holiday and are now able to snap those pants and buckle the belt back up. In the hustle and bustle of daily life we often get so caught up in the whirlwind of activity and things to do that we forget to take time to be grateful for what we have. One of the great things about the Thanksgiving holiday is that it reminds us to take stock of our lives and to be thankful for what we have. A roof over our heads, food on the table and a healthy family are the things for which I am very thankful.

The other major thing of which I am eternally grateful for is you, the staff/owners of this great company. At some point of every day, perhaps when I am sitting at my desk, taking an evening walk or laying in bed at night after awakening at 2 am, I think of the Aurora staff who are working 24 hours a day 365 days a year so that those we serve may have the opportunity to live a quality life in their community.

One of the things that is always a pleasure is when I receive an email of a story of what is happening daily in the homes where we serve. A few weeks ago I received one of those stories that was written by one of our Regional Coordinators. I have changed the names and omitted identifying information, but this story is told over and over again so it really could be anywhere in Auroraland. Here is that story:

"Donald had his one year annual review last week. A review for which the theme was success. Success when all the State experts, forensic psychiatrists, psychologists, doctors, social workers, and other various "experts" all had come to the conclusion that Donald was a danger to society and

belonged at Mendota. Success when Donald had not yet been enrolled in family care because the MCO was reluctant to enroll him and "take this chance" as they were drinking the State professionals kool-aid.

One year later Donald is happy to announce that he loves his house and loves all the guys working with him. He has a lot of fun and gets to do a lot of things that he likes to do and he shared several of his stories. He has learned to cook and eat healthy, is exercising on a pretty regular basis and has lost 20-30 pounds over the past year. What the case manager said at the staffing and I quote, "Wow, who could have seen this coming?" They said this at least three different times throughout the staffing as we recognized his weight loss, his healthy choices, the decrease in behavioral issues and the development of coping skills. "Wow, who could have seen this coming?" Donald, who was said to have a disorder that made him aggressive, has demonstrated extreme remorse after a few behavioral episodes where he physically lashed out at staff. He later apologized and sought assurances from staff that everything was ok and that he was not going to have to go back to Mendota. Staff responses have been consistent, "Dude, you are not going anywhere. We will work through the tough times. Thanks for saying you are sorry." The MCO's response, "Wow, who could have seen this coming?"

The answer to the MCO's repeated question of, "who could have seen this coming" is simple. We, Donald's Aurora family, saw this coming. This was a very powerful staffing as it was very clear that something very amazing was happening. It was an excellent lesson in not letting the "experts" dictate someone's life when

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CEO Corner cont'd

there are people (Aurora) who are ready, willing, and able to give that person the chance he or she so justly deserves."

As I said, we have heard this story time and time again over our 25 year history. "Donald" was essentially sentenced to a life at Mendota State Hospital by "the experts" (Mendota by the way is \$1,000 per day per person - a much higher rate than Aurora). We have served and continue to serve hundreds of individuals who would be living in State run institutions if it wasn't for Aurora's attitude - and I quote, "Dude, you are not going anywhere. We will work through the tough times." It is what we do. This story and the many others just like this are why I am so grateful; why I take a moment every day to reflect on the great work that you all are doing. Donald can be grateful for the staff who hang in there with him, but I'm sure if I spoke with those staff they would say how grateful they are for the lessons Donald has taught them. I know that I am for the many lessons I have learned from those we serve.

So as we move deeper into the holiday season I wanted to tell you how thankful I am for all that you do and I ask that you take a moment from time to time, in the midst of the hustle and bustle, and count the many blessing we all have in life and also in doing what we do.

Wishing you and your family a joyous holiday season!

Dave

Life Photo of the Month



Vocational Spotlight *by* Seth Boodle

Home Town Champions



The success seen within Aurora Vocational Services is directly proportional to our business partners' ongoing commitment to employing people with disabilities. For this reason, we would like to recognize and thank these champion businesses for their cooperation and partnership with Aurora, and more importantly, their unique ethos of compassion and commitment to disabled individuals.

This month I would like to feature artist Tammy Roy, who is the owner of 180 Design in Stratford. 180 Design makes "unique reclaimed metal home decor, home accessories and accents created from recycled metal." Tammy's business has grown to include customers from around the country, yet is based in the small town of Stratford.

Employment opportunities are limited in a rural area like Stratford, but Tammy willingly hired two Aurora consumers to work at 180 Design. Anthony came to Aurora in September 2010 for employment services and was hired in December 2010. He works grinding and sealing metal home furnishings. Anthony said he "really likes working with tools and is happy with his new job." He can be seen with the owner Tammy Roy, the owner of 180 Design, in the picture above.

"Hold your temper and keep your patience under all circumstances, for when you yield to vengeance you destroy reconciliation."

Consumer Spotlight

by Brian Anderson

This month's Consumer Spotlight reads more like the biography of a cat than a person, but there is no better way to describe this consumer than as having nine lives. Steven "Miracle Man," pictured in the blue t-shirt, has defied death on multiple occasions, making him an inspiration, as well as an ideal candidate for the Consumer Spotlight.

Steven is originally from a large family (8 brothers and sisters!) in Wisconsin Rapids. He has lived at his current home, in Wausau, for the past 6 years. He has loved every minute of it; although, his time there has not been without some pretty difficult incidents.

In the spring of 2010, Steven was suffering from pneumonia, and began to aspirate. This caused him to be put on life support at the hospital for several months. At one point over his stay, he pulled his vent tube out, which caused quite a commotion. Following this, the decision was made to remove the life support, and bring Steven back to his home for hospice care. At this point, everyone was bracing for the worst, but Steven showcased some of his cat-like attributes, and began to show improvement. This culminated with him jumping out of his bed, after being bed-ridden for three months; all in all, a very inspiring feat. Despite this success, Steven would find himself in yet another crisis.

Steven's next crisis occurred when he had a seizure, and began to aspirate again. He was brought into the hospital, and the prognosis was not good. He was placed on life support again, but this was removed upon the request of Steven and his family to allow him to fight on his own. His condition worsened, and at one point a priest was summoned to read him his last rites. As the priest read, Steven began to stir. How did he respond? He actually hit the priest! Following this, Steven's vitals began to improve, and he began to regain consciousness. After some time, he was allowed to return home, where he remains to this day.

Steven can be found running the halls of the office singing



songs, or shouting "save money, buy a bike", as well as many other comical phrases that he has picked up. His sense of humor resonates with many staff, family, and friends. His inspirational tale, as well as sense of humor, also endears him to his community; you would be hard pressed to find someone not eager to tell a story about their interaction with Steven. With the holidays coming up, Steven's story is one that should be celebrated. It reminds us of the durability of the human spirit, as well as showing us the importance of acceptance. Take a cue from Steven this season: life has so much to offer, and no obstacle is too big, so go out there and live life as best you can.

Safety Spotlight of the Month

Operation 072 in Eau Claire is the Central Region has been selected for this month's Safety Award. This operation faces many challenges that highlight the importance of safety involving complex medical, as well as intense behavioral issues. This requires staff to use the right approach to assure the safety of consumers and staff. Great work team!

Operation 15/19 is the Eastern Region winner of the Safety Award. While visiting a neighboring operation, a program manager noticed a sign as she entered the bathroom. The sign had a picture of a water puddle, making her aware of the possibility of standing water from a walk in shower. The sign, with the use of some color, was very eye catching and a great tool for safety awareness. This idea has now been implemented at other operations. The best part of this nomination is the realization that workings as a team and sharing information helps create a safe environment for both consumers and staff.

Operation 100 in Hudson is nominated for this month's Safety Spotlight for the Northwest Region. This very busy house currently serves four consumers. I am very happy to say there have been very few injuries historically at this site. When asked, the staff says that it is because of good communication and good team decisions concerning safety issues. Safety is discussed at every team meeting, with input from all staff. Equipment is maintained regularly and all staff uses the equipment properly.

A Day in the Life

by Sadie Bygd

For those of you who have been with Aurora longer than the last few years, you may remember that Aurora's branding used to look a lot different than what you see today; website, The Beacon, letterhead, literature and, of course, Starman! All of this is thanks to our very own Stavroula Marcell! As Aurora's PR/ Communications Director, she designs, creates and invents everything we see in Aurora's branding. Her involvement has touched all of Aurora's five companies, Down Syndrome Footprint and GrandView of Roxborough in Colorado.

Stavroula is originally from Patras, Greece and eventually she and her family moved to the United States. Stavroula has extensive family that lives in Greece and siblings living in Florida and New York. Stavroula has two kids: Megan (7) and Carson (5) and lives in Chippewa Falls.

Stavroula also owns a freelance company, Stavroula Designs, which is actually how she started with Aurora. She was hired to work on redesigning Aurora's logo and soon after, she was hired on full-time. Stavroula was immediately sent to work - pulling together Aurora's ideas, wishes and dreams - turning them into products and services; then marketing them to businesses and communities.

Stavroula has always been interested in anything to do with art. She remembers her first "ah-ha" moment when in 8th grade she stayed up all night drawing a portrait of a friend and realized she could draw more than just cartoons. Interestingly, Stavroula was actually going to be a lawyer but found a class called "Graphic Design" and the rest is history!

Stavroula is also a self-proclaimed travel-junkie. To date, she has been to 27 of the US states and 18 countries. Her goal is to see all 50 US states and 50 countries. Her last trip was to New York City to see the tree-lighting in Rockefeller Plaza last month.

Thank you, Stavroula, for all that you do!



Realize and Embrace Authentic Living

Really...

You are just fine the way you are. Your family is doing just fine too. REALLY, you're fine!

Celebrate the achievements of others while cherishing your own. Success is contagious - catch it!

Admire the skills, talents and abilities of others without projecting yourself upon them. Everyone is talented in their own special way.

Be curious about learning new information, conducting research and seizing opportunities because you **WANT** to, not because you **NEED** to.

REALLY, you are fine just the way you are. Your REAL self is cause for celebration, admiration and curiosity too.

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Employees of the Month

By Donna Ernst

The employee of the month is chosen for his or her outstanding work performance and awesome attitude in working with consumers, their co-workers and their job. What you may not know is this:

Northwest Region's Employee of the Month - **Debra Dolney**. Debra is a very compassionate and dedicated employee who has been with us for seven years. She is currently the live-in staff in Prescott. Over the years she has worked in a variety of homes within the Northwestern region as a live-in, a community living assistant, and as a Program Manager. Debra says she "really enjoys working for Aurora and loves working with the consumers, taking them to events in the community, and just enjoys spending time with them." Debra is a hard worker and a dedicated individual who is always willing to do whatever it takes to ensure the consumers she serves are safe and living life to the fullest. Thank you and congratulations!



Central Region's Employee of the Month - **Terry Spangenberg**. Terry has been part of the Aurora Family since April of 1996 and is program manager at Op 072 in Eau Claire. If ever there was an example of a person who has made a difference in the lives of consumers, Terry would be a first choice. He makes LIFE happen for the two consumers at 072. Here is just a brief summary of some of the neat trips and vacations Terry has arranged for and participated on for the guys. Trips to the Dells to stay at hotels and enjoy the water parks and hot tubs, trips to Minnesota to see a Twins game or go to the State Fair, camping trips up north, little weekend getaways just to mix things up a bit, and then the big fun ones like trips to Kentucky and Florida to enjoy warm weather and fun in the water. The consumers that Terry took on these trips were once living in institutions and today they are living in their own home, making decisions for themselves and going on trips that absolutely rock! Terry has been the difference maker and has made LIFE happen. Congrats Terry. You deserve this recognition.



Eastern Region's Employee of the Month - **Bucky Hinz**. Jessica Kroncke, PD says "Bucky has worked in several of ARA's homes over the past six years. Over this time he has been asked to work with some very challenging consumers. Many of these consumers have had their ups and downs and Bucky was able to find a good balance between caregiver and friend, or as many say "buddy." There is one guardian who even says he is like a brother. He has built relationships with consumers that others haven't been able to and he has found a way to earn their trust and respect. He finds a way to encourage consumers to gain satisfaction and enhance independence. Bucky is a great asset to every team he has been on and can always be counted on to help out when needed. Keep up the good work! Congratulations!



The straw that broke the camel's back

I started smoking in eighth grade because my boyfriend did. I told myself he would quit smoking, if I threatened to start. Months later smoking had become an enjoyable and cool thing, at least initially.

By the time I was in my 20s and having children, my mindset changed. I really did want to quit and assure my children's health during the pregnancies, as well as the home environment they would be exposed to. Will power alone couldn't stop me. Desire to quit had no affect. Being disgusted by the smell on my clothes, hair, belongings and especially on the children, couldn't deter my loathsome habit.

I hated being a slave to these stinky, expensive, unhealthy cigs, especially because both of my parents died young of heart disease. Now doctors were warning us of the bad effects, and even cigarette packages warn that "smoking is hazardous to your health." Attempt after attempt, I failed, and each failure made me feel worthless, with no willpower.

The years passed and cigarettes got more expensive. My broken promises to quit next week, for a New Years resolution, or on my birthday passed over and over again with no success. But new motivation would come and prove to be the last push I needed to try again.

It started when my seven-year-old son Jonathan came home from school with an unexpected and bizarre announcement. He declared his teacher says, "I shouldn't do drugs." What!? I don't do drugs; I tried to explain to him I just smoked cigarettes. I insisted he must go back to school and make sure his teacher also understood I DO NOT DO DRUGS, that I only smoked cigarettes.

There was no convincing him; I called the school to clarify and found out the guidance counselor gave a speech about "Drugs and Alcohol." They referred to nicotine as a drug, which I admitted and know it is, but it is not in the same category as "real" drugs. I tried to argue and reason, but they nor my son would concede in referring to my cigarettes in this insulting and embarrassing manner.

I couldn't have my son going around telling people his mom "takes drugs." So in essence, it was just the boost I needed to attempt quitting AGAIN. I couldn't bear the thought of another failed attempt. There was a program going on locally sponsored by the governor's wife that promoted health for women. They would be giving away free stop smoking nicotine patches to attendees. This was worth quite a bit of money, time and was now incorporated into my plan of quitting.

Then I visited my family doctor and asked/requested the advertised medication on his quit smoking posters. He knew how hard and long I had been battling with this addiction; he couldn't write up the prescription fast enough, and wished me well on my endeavor.

Now I would need a tool to hold between my fingers, something that could be available at the majority of my habitual smoking locations and situations: driving, on the phone, when tense, mad and sad, basically the majority of each and every day. Well, who would have thought a simple straw cut in half could accomplish so much.

My straws became my life savers; I could hold them anytime anywhere. I could bite on them, chew on them and even tie them in knots. They became my go-to for every situation, and every mood. Long after I stopped wearing the nicotine patches and stopped taking the medication, I still used my straws. I celebrated my first year as a non-smoker, but continued chewing on my ever reliable, life saving half straws. I don't know of or have ever seen anyone else using this straw method, but I would definitely recommend it.

I have been an ex-smoker since 1999. Straws have a special place in my heart (my healthier heart, that is). Give it a try, who knows this might be your time (or your season) to become a winner. You only lose if you quit trying. I encourage you to form a bond with a straw today!

