



# The Competitive Edge

BCRC, Inc., 131 Pleasant Drive, 2nd Floor, Aliquippa, PA 15001-3515

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## Blackberry Pie is a Gesture of Love

by Frank Shialabba

Dustin Taylor knows that nobody could make a blackberry pie the way his mother used to. Dustin, a WIN participant, tries to keep his mother's memory alive by doing things that she would do, especially at the holidays. Recently, he made the blackberry pie that his father loves so much as a gesture of love and caring. Such kindness is typical of Dustin, a sensitive young man, who has found successful employment in the community.



Dustin is successful because he cares about everyone and everything he does. He is extremely conscientious at this job and never misses a day. WIN Director Sheila Silbaugh states, "Dustin is just a really, really hard worker. He has grown greatly in his ability to independently solve problems and take responsibility. He is a self-advocate who can express his needs to others. Dustin helps his father take care of the bills and makes sure they are paid on time. He also keeps an eye out for an elderly neighbor to assure that he is alright."

WIN follows up with Dustin to provide support and encouragement. According to Ms. Silbaugh, "Dustin cares so much about his job that he needs to be reassured that he is doing well. We are more than happy to provide support to this very talented young man."

Every year, Dustin considers a new challenge to undertake.

In addition to his many responsibilities, Dustin volunteers at a local library. Growing, caring, and working hard are the hallmarks of this exceptional young man. ■

## Records Management Experiences Growth at CenterPlace

by Sabine Kane

BCRC's Record Management Center (RMC) location has expanded to a second work area at BCRC's CenterPlace. Records Management Coordinator, Lisa Vesolich, stated that the need for storage was an important reason for the additional space due to the requirement that all documents be retained for 90-days after scanning before they can be shredded. This allows for the customer to review the product after scanning completion, and to request rescans if necessary. Another reason for the expansion was the space required by some of RMC's modern technology, some of which had previously been in storage.

Currently, Records Management is working on projects for 12 customers, some are ongoing, others proceed as the paperwork comes in. In addition, BCRC has 10-12 proposals that are pending for possible additional jobs. Records Management accepts work from customers all over the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, as well as Eastern Ohio.

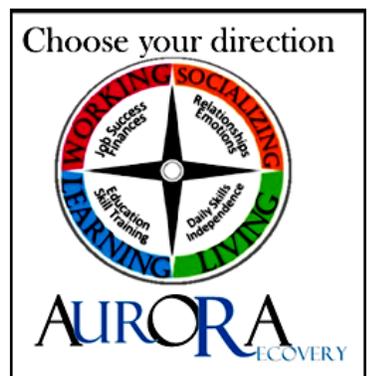
Ms. Vesolich says that some projects require complicated preparation and are very labor intensive. There are currently 15 clients participating in the preparation of documents. ■

## Social Connections Are Essential to Recovery

by Laurel Baker

Anyone with a significant mental health challenge will tell you, socialization is hard. Yet it is an important part of a successful recovery – having a support system in place can make all the difference. Many of our participants have faced numerous barriers in establishing healthy connections, ranging from a lack of confidence to the very real fear of stigma and stereotype. Aurora Services addresses this domain by providing education on appropriate communication skills, social finesse, and how to navigate those inevitable awkward moments. The staff role models these skills on a daily basis and encourage increased self-efficacy. Community events and resources are shared for all to see and discuss.

Friday lunches provide a great opportunity for the participants to practice the skills they have learned. Volunteering to assist in the meal preparation promotes increased self-confidence, awareness of kitchen safety needs, and reduces anxiety related to preparing healthy food on a limited budget. Meanwhile, those in attendance are challenged to sit around a table, family-style, and engage in social manners, interesting conversation, and to improve their tolerance to bigger crowds and differing personalities. It is also the perfect time to remember how beneficial it is to practice gratitude! After all, sharing a quality meal together can be the ultimate test of patience, but also one of the greatest blessings. ■



## Spotlight On: Mary Ruhnke

by Kelly Newhouse

Mary Ruhnke has been hired as BCRC's new director of client services. She takes the position following the retirement of Kathy Davis. Mary has 31 years of experience in the social services field. Her most recent position as program manager for Blended Case Management was the ideal fit for our needs. Mary joined BCRC on November 1, 2017.

Mary skillfully manages the daily functioning of the workshop, supervising the job coaches and the supervisor of program specialists. She states that the best things about her job are her "coworkers, participants, and working for an incredibly supportive and reputable company that fosters growth and change." Her hopes for the future of the prevocational program and BCRC would be for the program to grow and that BCRC "continues to be a leader of our trade." In addition, she hopes that the participants always enjoy coming to a "safe and stimulating environment; and to work at their fullest potential." Mary's expertise and ideals are a perfect match for BCRC's mission.

After a day at work, Mary enjoys spending time with her husband of 26 years. She also enjoys gardening, landscaping, and decorating and design. Along with these very creative hobbies, she has a strong interest in construction, real estate, vehicles, and throw in some great cooking and entertaining too! Welcome Mary! ■



## Students Achieve Success at FedEx

by Caitlyn Davis and Mary Jo Sanders

Twelve students in the School to Work program had the opportunity to work at a FedEx facility over Christmas break. The students were given the flexibility needed for their school schedules. Students worked as parcel assistants, scanning, sorting, and moving packages for transport around the facility. Their hard work was praised and appreciated by the FedEx staff members.



One of the students who participated in this paid work experience far exceeded her own expectations. Tonya was that student. She is faced with visual impairments, and she was nervous that she would not be able to keep up with other students. After a brief training period, Tonya established her own routine and excelled at scanning and sorting. Of the 12 students employed, Tonya scanned the most packages every day that she attended. She refused to call off, despite a stubborn cold that may have prevented others from attending. Tonya is building her resume and work experiences, and she's excited to explore more work opportunities. Her daily motto is "Livin' the Dream!"

All 12 students are valued employees and School to Work could not be more proud of their accomplishments. ■

## With Change Comes Opportunity

by Jessica Rusak

When Stacey Quick sets her mind to something, she finds a way to follow through—and it's that perseverance that has led to her most recent success.

It's safe to say that with over 21 years of engaging in services, Stacey has been a familiar face to many of us here at BCRC.

Over the years, she has become very skilled at a variety of jobs including making five different types of boxes, using the bow maker, mailings, decorating wreaths, and she has also gained a considerable amount of experience in assembling candy bouquets and other creative items.

Stacey received prevocational and transitional services at the New Brighton location, where she relied on her parents for transportation to and from the program. In May 2017, after an agency decision to consolidate buildings and centralize programming, these services relocated to the CenterPlace location. This change caused Stacey's means of transportation to become uncertain.

It was no longer feasible for her parents to continue transporting her and public transportation became the only available option. However, sometimes with change, comes opportunity...and with this change Stacey was given an opportunity to learn yet another new skill - using public transportation.

With the help of her family and supports coordinator, Stacey is now successfully and independently using public transportation. This has been a



great experience for her and she is even thinking more about possible competitive employment.

"I was nervous at first, but now I feel great," she said. ■

## Students Find Careers Through Supported Education

by Gina Alberti

Young men and women of different backgrounds and varying skills find careers through BCRC's Supported Education program. Under the HELPing BC SCORES grant, the Supported Education program identifies adolescents who require additional educational support but do not necessarily meet the requirements for the School to Work program.

With post-secondary education as the ultimate goal, BCRC's Susan Smith and her team evaluate students' needs and abilities before designing a plan to get them to graduation. For some, their plan will begin with the mastery of basic skills such as sticking to a routine and waking up each morning at an appropriate time. For others, staffers schedule visits to college campuses and local businesses, allowing the students the opportunity to engage in job shadowing and interact with current college students. Many staff members work into the evening to help provide these services. Smith expressed pride in the program, citing the story of one young woman within the juvenile justice system who, with the help of the Supported Education team, is now a freshman at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Based on the dedication of BCRC staff, it is safe to say that many more success stories will emerge in the future. ■

## Retirees Brought Touch of Class and Humor to BCRC

by Frank Shialabba

Two valued BCRC staff members, Susan Hill and Rick Schwarz, have retired recently. Ms. Hill retired after 14 years, while Mr. Schwarz spent 10 years at BCRC.

Susan Hill was a beacon of light for those who worked with her. If you ever needed an infusion of positive energy, Susan's "sunshine room" was the place to go. Susan's room was the hub of positivity with its bright yellow walls and the sunny dispositions of Susan and her wonderful crew in Candy Bouquet.

Susan started at BCRC as a job coach in 2004 and eventually became the Marketing Coordinator for Gifts Delivered. According to Executive Assistant Susan Leiper, "it was in this position [Candy Bouquet] that we were able to see Susan's creative talents. The clients working closely with her took great pride in their accomplishments." Ms. Leiper calls Susan, "a consummate professional who brought to BCRC and the departments in which she worked a "touch of class."

Susan touched many lives while working at BCRC. Mary Jo Sanders, Susan's former co-worker in Candy Bouquet says, "I most liked the happy and positive attitude that Susan had every day, she was kind and caring toward her co-workers and devoted to the clients. She was a daily inspiration to me and she will be sorely missed." Executive Director Paulette Miller echoes these sentiments, "I will certainly miss her positive outlook on everything about BCRC, especially the clients." Coworker Sue Middleman recalls "how kind she was to each client and how she made each one feel special. Most of all I will miss her beautiful smile and the many conversations that we had about life."



**Rick displays his retirement gift, a Zippo lighter, with depictions of all branches of the U.S. Military and a circled emblem that reads "Defenders of Freedom."**

"the emails that Rick would send around the holidays to wish us joy."

Rick was also known for his sense of humor and patriotism. Laura Medarac, BCRC Building Manager, recalls Rick's ability to



add a little fun to many maintenance projects. She states, "you could often hear his 'ho, ho, ho' around the Christmas holidays." Rick also made sure that we gave every patriotic holiday its due respect."

Positive energy, fun and patriotism are traits found in BCRC's two recent retirees. These two staff members will be missed by both clients and staff. We wish them health and happiness in their retirement. ■

## Let There Be Light!

by Frank Shialabba

Both clients and staff have benefited from the many recent improvements at CenterPlace.

Two of the most dramatic improvements at BCRC's CenterPlace are the addition of large sliding glass doors in the client lunchroom and a new client entrance.

The effect of the glass doors in the lunchroom is immediate and uplifting. Natural light now flows through the lunchroom into the work area. Clients can glance outside when they eat or work and get a glimpse of

the weather. Building Manager, Laura Medarac, says the lunchroom will eventually open to a courtyard where clients and staff can gather during their breaks when weather permits. In addition,



**New client entrance.**



**New client lunchroom doors and windows.**

the new client entrance will add to overall safety and security, while providing easier access to visitors who are arriving for client meetings and/or program monitoring. Visitors will be buzzed into the work area by a receptionist on the first floor.

Ms. Medarac has also seen many other improvements at CenterPlace. Offices have been created adjacent to the client work area for the program specialists so they can easily see clients to provide aid and counsel. Clients also have access to additional new restrooms and a new elevator that will take them to BCRC's second floor. The office areas on the first and second floors have been expanded to include 16 new offices and four new bathrooms. In addition, three existing bathrooms have been renovated. Three multipurpose rooms have been added that may be used for conferences, special events or additional work space. All in all, Ms. Medarac is pleased with BCRC's rapid progress in making changes that will make for a happier and more productive work environment. ■



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## Safety Lights

*by Cindy Kirkpatrick*

### Be Aware of Tornado Warnings

In the northeast section of the United States, tornadoes tend to occur in late spring or early summer. They are most likely to occur between 3 p.m. and 9 p.m., but of course can occur any time. Tornadoes are one of nature's most violent storms. The winds can reach 300 mph. The path of damage can be in excess of one mile wide and 50 miles long. In order to stay safe, it is important to be alert to changing weather conditions by watching the sky and listening to radio or TV announcements. It is also important to know the difference between a watch and a warning. A watch means that conditions are favorable for a tornado and you need to stay alert. A warning means that a tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar. Take shelter immediately! Seek shelter in a basement or interior room. If you are in a vehicle, mobile home or outside, find a safe shelter or lie flat in a ditch and cover your head with your hands. ■



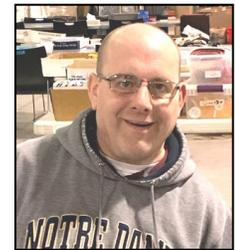
## Employee of the Month



**Samantha Schmidley**  
*January 2018*



**Craig Roberts**  
*February 2018*



**Thaddeus Knauff**  
*March 2018*

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