



THE BUZZ

For all things newsworthy at WACOSA

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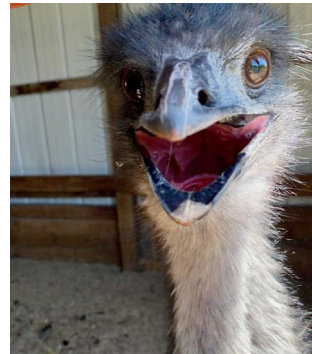
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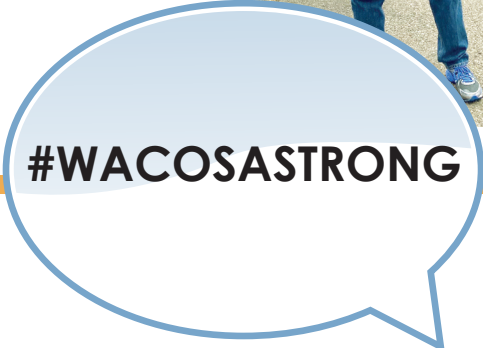
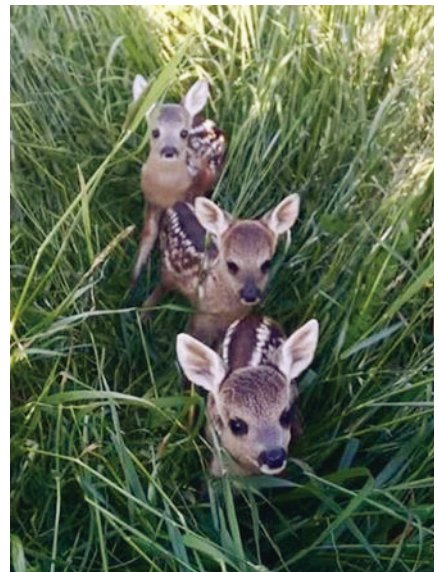
WACOSA Strong

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Ways to Give



I think that when the dust settles, we will realize how little we need, how very much we actually have, and the true value of human connection



WACOSA WORKS!

WACOSA's Executive Director Visits Middle East



“Given the continual unrest in the middle east, it truly was gratifying to have such a positive and educational experience”, says Steve Howard, WACOSA's Executive Director. Steve recently returned from a 7-day accreditation visit to the Shamah Autism Center located in Dammam, Saudi Arabia. Along with serving as WACOSA's Executive Director, Steve has served as a “CARF Surveyor” for the past 28 years of his career. CARF International's United States office is based in Tucson, Arizona. Incorporated in 1966, the name “CARF” originates from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities. CARF is an independent, nonprofit accreditor of health and human services that dedicates itself to ensuring that accredited programs focus on quality, rehabilitation results and continual best practices. WACOSA has been accredited at CARF's highest level since 2001.

While CARF accredits services internationally, this is the first time in 28 years working as a surveyor Steve has been asked to travel overseas to conduct an accreditation visit. “WACOSA's Board of Directors is incredibly forward-thinking in allowing me occasional time away to conduct these visits”, Howard says.

“While I am constantly learning new service techniques during these visits, I am also able to share many of the best practices and techniques WACOSA has found to be successful in serving people over the years. It truly is a win-win for both WACOSA, as well the programs I visit”. Steve was the administrative team leader on the recent, two-person team that visited Saudi Arabia. This recent trip helped me remember that, though the Shamah Autism Center is almost 7,000 miles away from WACOSA, we are still a community of providers all working as partners to help persons with a variety of challenges live the best lives they can. Autism in Saudi Arabia offers the same challenges it does for service providers here in the United States”. When asked to share one key takeaway from this recent experience, Steve pointed out that, “It helped me remember that, even with services a world away, we have an obligation to continue to do all we can to influence the lives of those we serve for the better. To do this, we need to constantly pursue service excellence and innovative practices. No matter where we live, how we dress or the language we speak, those we serve deserve nothing less”.

Incorporated in 1963, WACOSA is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization with offices located in Waite Park, St. Cloud and Sauk Centre, Minnesota. Its mission is to “provide individuals with disabilities the opportunity to work and live in their community”.

WACOSA provides services to approximately 700 individuals as year. For more information, contact Sales, Marketing and Communication Manager, Ann Kennedy at akennedy@wacosa.org or call 320-257-5191.

GREAT Theatre Teaches Clients About Self-Expression and Etiquette

We were dancers. We were singers. We were storytellers. We were ship captains, sports heroes and astronauts. We were happy, we were sad, we were angry, we were elated. Most of all, we were inspired. GREAT Theatre acting and performance coach Heather Mastromarco took WACOSA clients and staff on an adventure of creative self-expression and exploration through a variety of improv acting activities. We used props to spin tales of romance and heartbreak, friendship and community, and puppets to explore character development and emotion. While we performed, we were also an audience of students. We learned about theatre jobs and etiquette. We learned how to find our seat at a show and what it means when the lights are turned off and on (the show's about to begin). Nearly all of the clients who participated said they would enjoy future theater activities, so keep an eye out for more.



I enjoyed learning how to act and learning how to use hand puppets. When we acted like we were mad, I drove my wheelchair away from the group. That was fun. What I gained is how to express myself in different situations.

— Sarah Deppa



I love seeing the students gain confidence as they discover their creative power through play. They are expressing their emotions and creating unique characters that come from their own imaginative mind.

— Heather Mastromarco



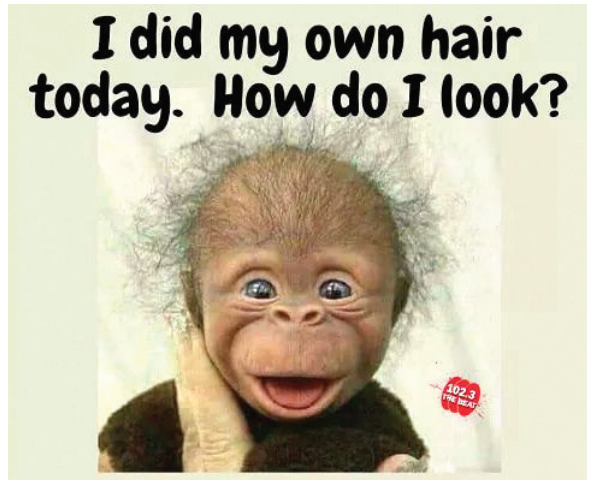
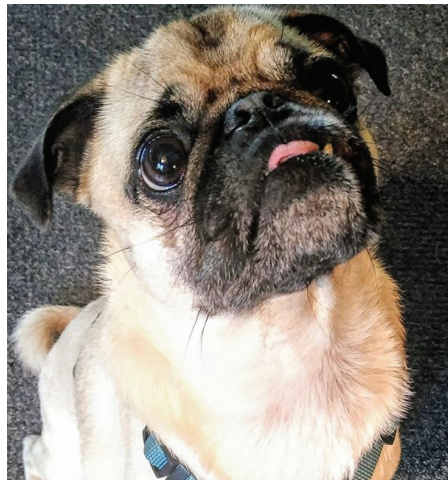
CMAB Grant Provides Access to Theatre

WACOSA was recently awarded a grant from the Central Minnesota Arts Board which allowed WACOSA and the GREAT Theatre to partner in offering the first of its kind "Introduction to Theatre" classes to some of WACOSA's folks. The introductory acting workshop encouraged and enabled participants to create their own unique characters and explore expressing themselves on stage. Participants learned about theatre basics and etiquette as well as building stage presence. WACOSA is continually striving to build ties within the community and valuable resources such as GREAT Theatre while also finding ways to enhance client-driven curriculum. Building a bridge to theatre for folks at WACOSA has long been a goal and this introductory workshop will open the door to more theatre opportunities. WACOSA has a passion to continuously find ways to diversify our programs as well as create access to the arts for all. We thank our partners at the GREAT Theatre for their enthusiastic collaboration with us as well as the Central Minnesota Arts Board for their continuous support in providing meaningful arts experiences.



Investing in the Arts throughout Benton, Sherburne, Stearns & Wright Counties.

I wondered why the Frisbee was getting bigger. Then it hit me.



During the pandemic WACOSA clients and staff created a Facebook group called WACOSA Friends where they were able to stay connected. In May 2020, the WACOSA staff got together and held a reverse parade to celebrate each other from a safe distance. Here are a few of our favorite things we shared on our page.

We told silly jokes

We shared pictures of our pets

We shared our outdoor adventures

We shared our cooking adventures

We got to watch eggs turn to fuzzy ducklings

We shared messages of hope

We shared messages of love

We are #WACOSASTRONG

#WACOSASTRONG – WACOSA FRIENDS



In case no one told you today:

- *You're beautiful*
- *You're loved*
- *You're needed*
- *You're alive for a reason*
- *You're stronger than you think*
- *You're gonna get through this*
- *Don't give up*



Volunteer Spotlight

Herb and Janet Gross

It's not every day you meet a power team like Herb and Janet. The couple started their relationship with WACOSA by donating to WACOSA's thrift store, ThriftWorks! "Our interactions with the clients while making donations was something we really enjoyed so we thought why don't we see if we can volunteer and really be able to get to know the people here," Herb shares. Janet adds, "Volunteering here at WACOSA, or any of the places we volunteer, it just gives us a good feeling in our heart and soul."



Janet and Herb spend their time at ThriftWorks! helping to price clothing, but they go way above and beyond by taking games home to be sure the pieces are there and bundling hangers for sale. "They do so much for the store, but I think what I like best about them is the positive energy and happiness they bring to everyone they interact with; they brighten everyone's day," said Kayla Goering, ThriftWorks Team Lead.

Herb and Janet, when not volunteering, enjoy time spent with their four children and nine grandchildren, as well as quilting and spreading the word of God through their work in their church.



Donor Spotlight

I love volunteering with WACOSA because it gives people purpose; it gives people jobs; it gives people community; but most of all because it gives people respect. From the administration and staff to the consumers and their families, from the donors to the volunteers, WACOSA is all about heart.

— Connie Cross

WACOSA Receives 2020 CMCF Response Fund Grant

WACOSA was the proud recipient of \$2500 "supported by a grant from the Central Minnesota Community Foundation". The dollars will help purchase personal protective equipment for vulnerable adults and those that care for them.

Create Your WACOSA Legacy

WACOSA invites you to create your WACOSA legacy, while establishing a sustainable future for adults with disabilities in Central Minnesota. By establishing a WACOSA endowment, it's never too early to begin critical planning for your future. No matter your age or financial situation, you can make a difference. What is an endowment? A WACOSA endowment receives contributions or pledges from individuals like you who are planning the distribution of their personal wealth following their death. Once contributed or pledged, these

funds remain restricted, meaning that only the interest earned from the fund can be accessed by WACOSA to help sustain WACOSA's important mission. The principal amount given to the organization remains intact, continuing to anchor the endowment year-after-year. You can rely upon WACOSA to remain an excellent steward of your dollars, leveraging your gift to the fullest extent possible on behalf of those we serve.

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Steve Howard, Ed.D
Executive Director

Nancy Betts
Vice President of Quality Assurance and Programs

Beth Sueker
Operations Director

Sandie Westergren
Human Resources Director

Traci Richter
Finance Director

Roxanne Ryan Layne
Business Development

Carrie Abfalter
Fund Development Manager

Ann Kennedy
Sales, Marketing, & Communications Manager

Mary Rothstein
Sauk Centre Site Coordinator

Stephanie Schaefer
Senior Site Coordinator

Lynn Welle
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Cherie Scofield

Jeanne Theis

Herb Trenz



WACOSA
WORKS!

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A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



#WACOSA Strong

Joshua Graham, author of *The Accidental Hero*, once responded to a question related to prison life by saying, “I survived because the fire inside me burned brighter than the fire around me”. I could not help but notice the incredible relevance of this quote given our immediate circumstances. The days in which we find ourselves are full of both small and large fires that sometime seem overwhelming and impossible to conquer. At times, we wonder if we have the strength to survive the multitude of changes we encounter each day. Moreover, we ask if we have what it takes to adapt to an uncertain “new normal”, when we cannot be entirely certain what the “new normal” really means. None of the challenges brought on by the recent COVID-19 pandemic are easy. The current crisis, has to various degrees, forced all of us to surrender some measure of control in our lives. As Americans we value our freedoms and control above all else. Restrictions of any kind, for an American citizen, can be a difficult pill to swallow.

These “unprecedented” times, to which they are often referred, require an unprecedented amount of strength and perseverance. Strength, I am proud to say, I see in our clients, staff and leadership in the midst of many daily obstacles; strength that is not only physical in nature, but strength of will, strength of purpose and, overall, strength of heart. It is often said, “Metal need only be placed in fire to determine its ultimate strength”. As members of our community, it is certain we are all experiencing our share of heat these days. As WACOSA’s Executive Director, I am proud to report WACOSA’s metal remains as resilient as ever; in the words of our staff, we remain “WACOSA Strong”.

Since suspending services in March of this year, a day does not pass where WACOSA staff members are not favored with a supportive comment by clientele, residential providers, family members, funding partners or employers sharing how supportive they are for WACOSA’s strength during this time and how excited they are for the return of regular service delivery. We are gratified to hear stories of our staff reaching out to those we serve to wish them well, express how much they are missed and check in to see how they are holding up during these difficult times. WACOSA staff extend a critical hand to our residential partners to share Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and/or research new sources of PPE supplies. They have stepped up to help supplement the staffing void felt by residential facilities, along with volunteering their time to wave to our many stakeholders from the side of Sundial Drive to remind everyone how much they are missed.

Throughout our lives, strength manifests itself in many ways. Strongman George Olesen pulled a 300-ton ship 17 feet with his bare hands. Mr. Eat-it-All, Michael Lotito, ate an airplane, piece-by-piece over the course of a 2-year period. 76-year old Russian grandma Sakinat Khanapiyeva’s once tore a telephone book in two. While these deeds are great, WACOSA will be working to leave an impression even greater, once COVID-19 eventually recedes. We hope to be an example of strength and support so that we can reflect back on this time and join the immortal Winston Churchill in asserting confidently that this was our “Finest Hour”. Or, to quote the words of the WACOSA Strong staff, “ Don’t worry, we got this”.

OUR MISSION:

To provide individuals with disabilities the opportunity to work and live in their communities.

OUR VISION:

To empower persons of all ability levels to reach their full potential.

Steve Howard

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Howard". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

WACOSA Executive Director

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WACOSA will not discriminate against or harass any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability, marital status, familial status, membership or activity in a local human rights commission, or status with regard to public assistance. We will take affirmative steps to ensure that all of our company’s employment practices are free of discrimination.



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