



THE BUZZ

For all things newsworthy at WACOSA

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- WACOSA Endowment
- WACOSA Governance
- A Message from the Director



Theatre Fun 101!

**Connect Academy
Adaptive Media
Project**

**WACOSA
WORKS!**

WACOSA DRIVE-IN EVENT



WACOSA's 2020 Drive-In Event

WACOSA's 2020 Drive-In Event was a huge success raising nearly \$41,000 for WACOSA programs. This year the Drive-In event replaced our annual Workin' It 1-5K to provide a friendly and socially distant get together to support WACOSA's mission, "to provide individuals with disabilities the opportunity to work and live in their community." On Saturday, August 8th, 2020, over 100 vehicles filled with participants parked at the Technical

High School to enjoy a slide-show, bingo and a video on the big screen. WACOSA wishes to thank all of our amazing sponsors at the Diamond, Platinum, Gold, Silver, and Bronze levels.

Thank you to all who participated in and supported this fun and meaningful event.

SPONSORS

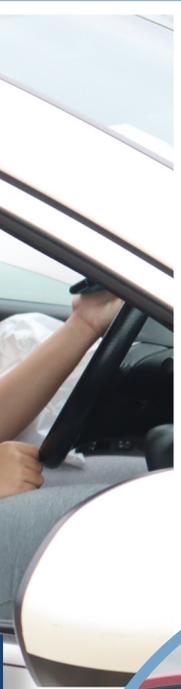
DIAMOND



J.A. WEDUM
FOUNDATION



LeRoy Northam



PLATINUM

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Dick & Mimi Bitzan



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Ron & Marlys Howard



SILVER

Individual sponsors: Steve & Patricia Howard,
Tim & Dana Gillet, Jeff and Jeanne Theis



BRONZE

Individual sponsors: Laura Krueger



COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Thank You for Your Support! Bus Vandalization Update.

In late September we put out a call for help due to several of our buses being vandalized. Since COVID has already put a strain on many organizations across the country, you can imagine our dismay when we realized we were targeted by the vandals. Those feelings of dismay were quickly wiped away by the amazing outreach we received from our community. Through donations to WACOSA, we were able not only to fix the vans that were vandalized, but also to purchase equipment to protect against this kind of vandalism in the future. A BIG thank you to everyone who donated, shared the posts and contacted us directly to offer suggestions and support. Because of you we can continue to transport our folks to and from work safely!



DONOR SPOTLIGHT

“I was originally approached by a coworker who inquired about my interest in getting involved with a nonprofit organization. I investigated WACOSA and was very impressed with the services they provide and the very client centric approach throughout the entire organization. It has been a rewarding and enriching experience for me personally to help contribute to the success of a nonprofit organization. I encourage others to explore volunteering within nonprofit organizations.”

— LeRoy Northam

Central Minnesota Community Foundation

WACOSA was the proud recipient of a \$16000 grant from the Central Minnesota Community Foundation Special Needs Grant. This grant allowed WACOSA to collaborate with a local physical therapist, update physical therapy assessments evaluations and purchase upgraded therapy equipment for the 35 individuals served at 1st Ave. Optimizing health through therapy and equipment is a top priority in ensuring the physical and medical needs are met for the folks at 1st Ave.



“Supported by a grant from the Central Minnesota Special Needs Fund of the Central Minnesota Community Foundation.”

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Minnesota Truck Headquarters Donates \$10,200 to WACOSA

Never underestimate the power of the WACOSA family! Minnesota Truck Headquarters (MTH) put out a challenge on social media for their annual Race to 300 event. The first call to action was asking the public to vote between multiple area nonprofits, with the top four nonprofits being entered into the Race to 300 donation event. WACOSA won the top slot by a landslide, thanks to all of our supporters who tirelessly voted for us daily. Once the top four were chosen, MTH customers who

purchased a vehicle during the Race to 300 could pick which nonprofit they wanted to support. Through this event MTH and their customers raised a whopping \$10,200 for WACOSA! Thank you to everyone who voted for us and chose us when they purchased their vehicle, and to MTH for their amazing community support.

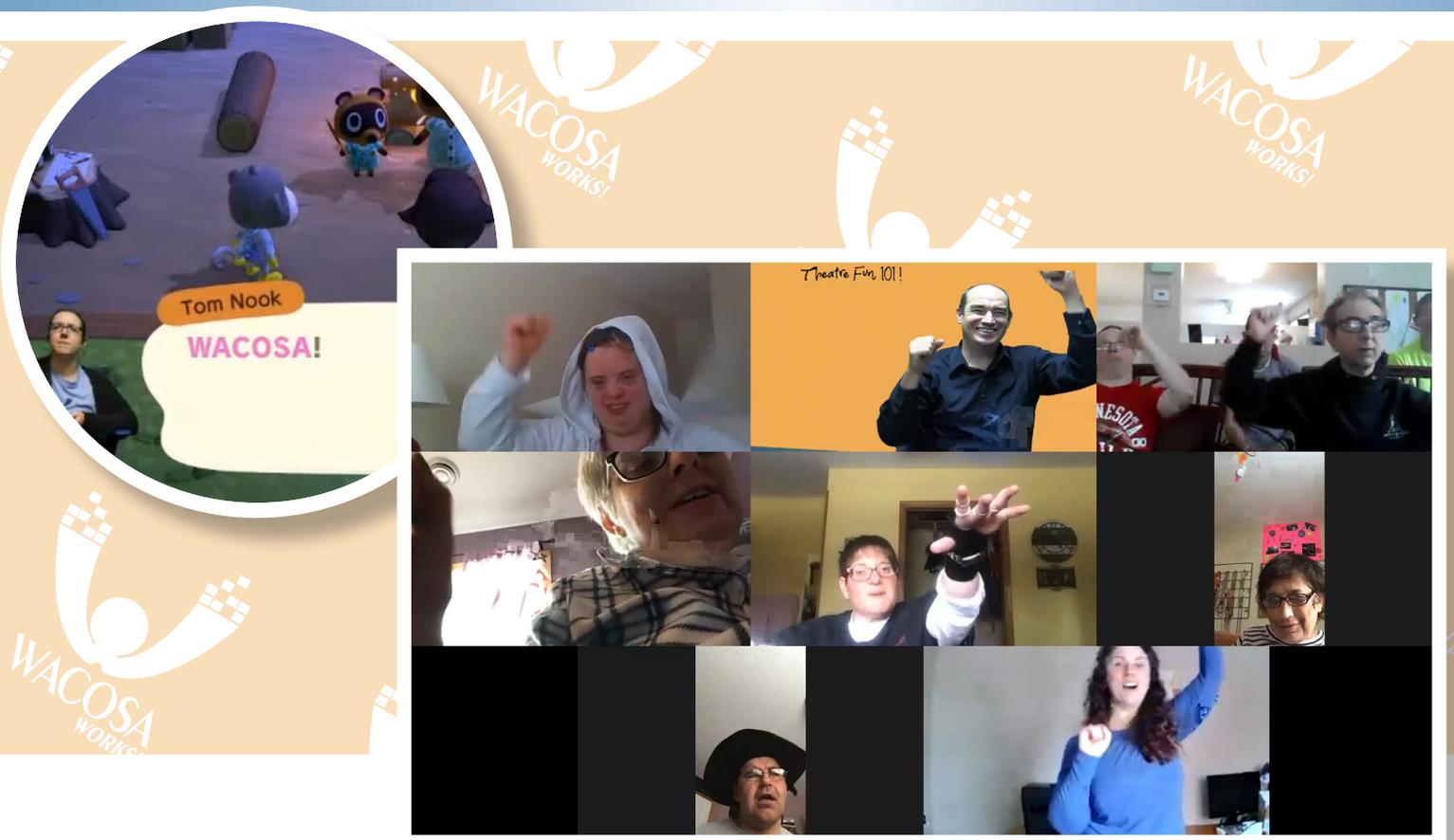


Benton Telecommunications and Central MN Noon Optimist Club

Throughout this worldwide pandemic, health and safety has been and will continue to be our number one priority. Thanks to a grant from the Benton Telecommunications Foundation and a generous donation from the Central Minnesota Noon Optimist Club, WACOSA was able to purchase portable sanitization sprayers for disinfecting surfaces at our multiple locations.

WACOSA extends a huge thank you to Benton-Telecommunications Foundation and the Central Minnesota Noon Optimist Club for their support.

CONNECT ACADEMY – ADAPTIVE MEDIA PROJECT



Honoring Adaptive Media

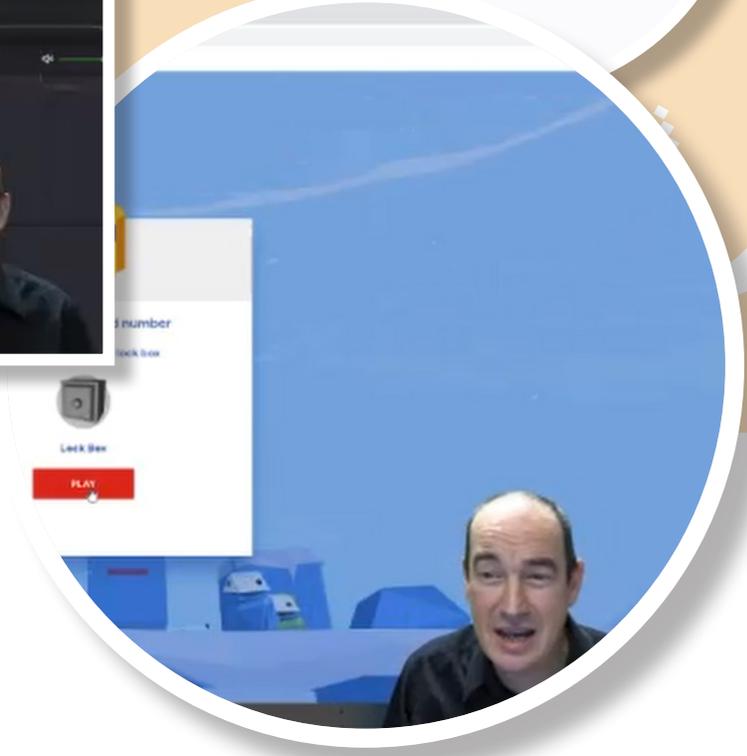
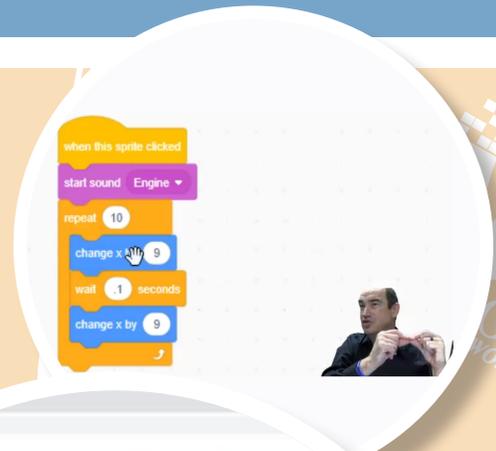
Have you ever wanted to learn how to code a computer program or make a video on an iPad? Maybe you've wanted to try your hand at acting or cooking lasagna in the microwave. Many of the people we serve are exploring these topics and more through our WACOSA Connect Academy virtual classes, live on Zoom.

The idea for the Connect Academy came a year ago as we started to look at new ways to use technology, specifically video making and video communication. We saw this as a way to increase the connection between the people we serve and businesses in their community. We also saw it as an exciting chance to offer opportunities to gain valuable technology skills, which are so important in today's environment. We developed and submitted a project proposal, and were fortunate to be awarded a grant from the Morgan Family Foundation. WACOSA's Adaptive Media Project was born. And then, Covid-19 hit.

Lives were impacted en masse like never in our lifetimes. For the people we serve, social distancing meant an even greater chance of social isolation. The hard press to increase community activity hit a hard pause. Meanwhile, people throughout the world adapted with technology to bridge the gap in their social and work lives. Video communication went from being an emerging technology to being part of the fabric of our society. We at WACOSA were determined not to let the technology gap individuals with disabilities

already face become a further impediment to their social capita and wellbeing. Prepared with the equipment from the Morgan Family Foundation grant, we were ready to create something special to meet the present and rapidly changing needs of the people we support. As we adapted our physical locations to provide safe in-person services, we also adapted with technology to allow people to connect remotely. We converted a conference room at our Waite Park location into a video studio, complete with a chroma-key green wall, professional cameras, lights and live video production software. Using input gathered from WACOSA participants, we compiled a list of engaging and meaningful classes with something for everyone including classes in technology, self-advocacy, theatre, and health and wellness.

While technology plays a role in all of our classes, our Adaptive Media Project classes take it a step further. In Abilities Coding, we use a program called "Scratch", which was developed by MIT to make coding accessible to people of all ages and abilities. In Media Makers, we look at audio and video recording and editing and other forms of digital art on various programs and platforms, working as a group to create projects. In our Internet Safety class, we talk about how to be safe online, in all the ways we access the internet. Considering we offer these classes online, we see this as an essential part of our curriculum.



In our Minnesota Self Advocate classes, we look at the rights of individuals with disabilities and the history behind those rights, and we learn to practice effective communication. In Right On!, we learn about the accomplishments of leaders in the disability rights movements and are recording our own stories to share.

Before the pandemic, many of our clients had the pleasure of joining classes at GREAT Theatre, which were featured in our Summer 2020 newsletter. Those classes were so loved, we had to include more in our Connect Academy. In Theatre Fun 101, the wonderful and talented Heather Mastromarco takes us on a weekly journey of movement, skits, sock puppets, theatre games and more. All Abilities Adaptive Dance is a dance party every week. Storyteller and Adaptive Dance expert Nicholas Pawlawski often joins as a special guest teacher, weaving timeless tales into highly engaging participatory group dances.

Healthy living is another area many individuals we serve have shown frequent interest in. Chair Yoga starts the day off at a peaceful and centered place. In our cooking classes, we've made everything from pizza to Mandarin Orange Chicken. In our Healthy Relationships, we look at acquaintances, friends and any other relationship those attending want to learn more about.

We began offering classes in September. They started small, with only a few people attending each class, but those who attended kept returning because they enjoyed themselves so much. As others heard about the experiences people were having, the class sizes began to grow. To date, over 40 people have participated in classes from home, most of whom attend multiple weekly classes. Additionally, over 50 people join these classes from WACOSA sites. The more people who join, the better the classes get, as each person brings something new to the group. With this, the social network of each person grows as they take part in what has become a community. In the WACOSA Connect Academy, people reconnect with old friends and make new ones as they learn and share interesting experiences together.

WACOSA ENDOWMENT

Welcome Ed Stracke, WACOSA Estate Gift Planner

Please help us welcome Ed Stracke, WACOSA's new Estate Gift Planner. Ed has spent his entire career improving the lives of people with disabilities, including the past 36 years as CEO and Planned Giving Officer for True Friends and True Friends Foundation. Ed's experience from 45 years of hands-on, frontline work with donors and charitable organizations is the foundation for providing specialized planned giving and fundraising services. "WACOSA is such a well-respected and essential part of our community. I'm looking forward to meeting many of the passionate volunteers and donors about creating their own charitable legacy".



WACOSA Donor Kicks-Off Endowment

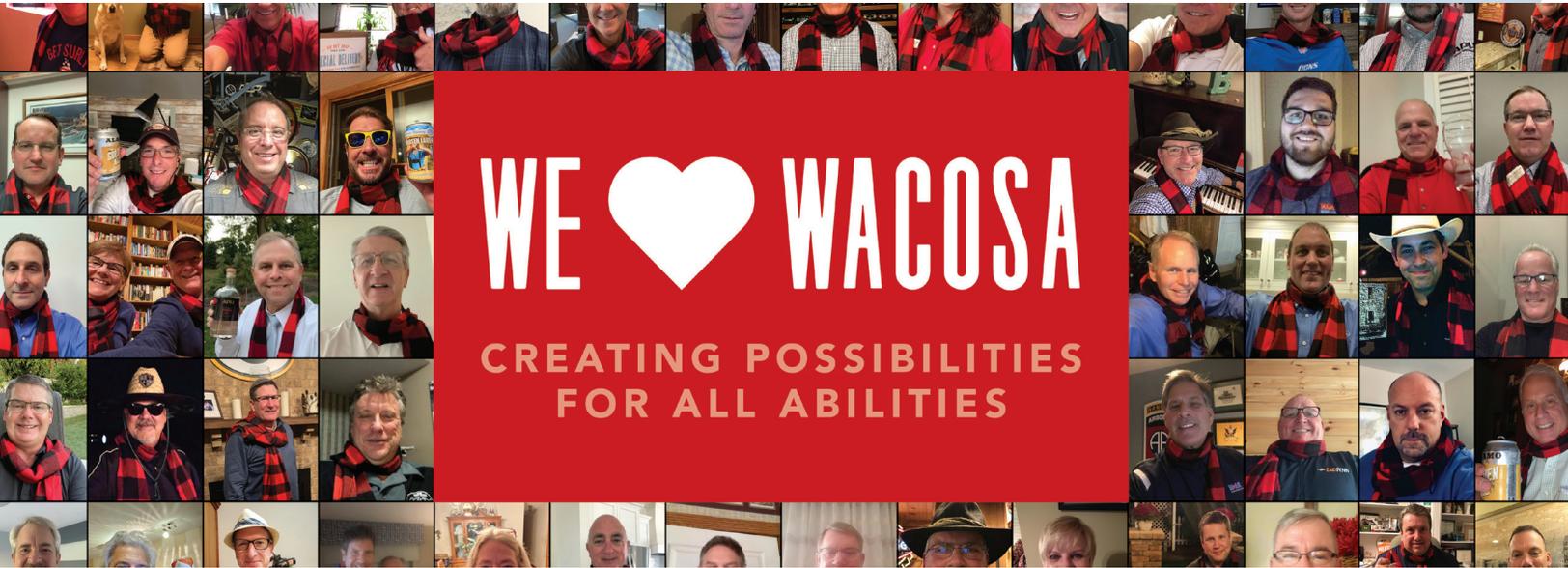
A WACOSA Endowment Fund has been formally established at the Central Minnesota Community Foundation thanks to a legacy gift given in loving memory of Carol, Mikey, and Bob Lenzmeier.

Endowments are designed to keep principal gift amounts intact while only using the investment income for charitable efforts.

The annual distribution from the WACOSA Endowment Fund will be used to sustain the important mission work of WACOSA. Whether you give a gift while you're still alive or through your estate, know that your charitable legacy will continue in perpetuity for the benefit of providing individuals with disabilities the opportunity to work and live in their community.

For more information about supporting the endowment fund or other estate gift planning opportunities, please contact Carrie Abfalter, Fund Development Manager at 320-257-5193 or cabfalter@wacosa.org.

APH OKTOBERFEST & MINNWEST BANK



Auto Parts Headquarters Oktoberfest Benefiting WACOSA

2020 would have marked the 10th Annual Chili Cook-Off event hosted by Auto Parts Headquarters (APH), the Bartlett family, and APH's channel partners. However, with our current COVID environment, APH and their team had to think creatively to continue their mission of supporting WACOSA. This year, in lieu of a Chili Cook-Off, APH created a virtual Oktoberfest-themed event. The event this year brought in an amazing \$301,000!

Over 85 APH channel partners and industry dignitaries joined the APH and WACOSA leadership team for a virtual Oktoberfest event, hosted by Corey Bartlett, president and CEO of APH. Before the event, all attendees were sent a copy of the book, The Lager Queen of Minnesota, a cozy red and black buffalo scarf, and a flight of hand-picked beers from across the country with a rating guide. Attendees enjoyed a beer tasting along with a lot of stories and laughter, all in celebration of WACOSA and what this group has achieved on WACOSA's behalf.

The Bartlett family, APH, and their partners have raised nearly \$1.2 million dollars for WACOSA over the past decade from their fundraising events. Steve Howard, WACOSA Executive Director, shares, "On behalf of all of us at WACOSA, we are extremely honored to be the annual recipient of this incredible donation. This effort, led yearly by the Bartlett family and APH, provides resources to assist hundreds of individuals with barriers in their lives to make future dreams a reality. APH, the Bartlett family and these amazing suppliers make up a powerful team, of which we are excited to be a part. Our successes, and the successes of those we serve, are their successes."

"I'm amazed by the support we've received, especially during this challenging year," said Corey Bartlett. "Every dollar raised will go a long way towards advancing WACOSA's mission. Simply put, we could not be more proud of and thankful for our supplier partners."



MinnWest Bank Supports Area Nonprofits

A big thank you to MinnWest Bank for their on-going support of WACOSA, and other area nonprofits.



REINVENTING WACOSA'S GOVERNANCE

Laura Krueger



Jeff Benveniste



Lindsey Rennie



WACOSA's Board of Directors has always been a supportive force in helping WACOSA remain strong and vital throughout its 57 plus years of operation. Board members strike a unique balance of providing strategic leadership, while at the same time supporting executive leadership, without micromanaging. WACOSA's board diversity spans a wide range of backgrounds and skills that have been invaluable to the organization's many successes. Moreover, this formula has proven effective as WACOSA has continually evolved and grown over the years.

WACOSA's board members realize the evolution and growth of the organization requires the same from its board of directors, if the board is to remain effective as services expand and innovate. In the spring of 2019, the WACOSA Board of Directors began the journey of reinventing itself in order to stay relevant in overseeing the needs of its many stakeholders. This journey resulted in a few key changes including:

- **Moving from 12 to 16 members**
- **Expanding the diversity of member skills**
- **Inviting a self-advocate to serve as an elected member**
- **Revision of by-laws**
- **Revision of Governance Policies**
- **Institution of formal board and committee charters**
- **Redesign of committee formats, board processes and number of subcommittee meetings**
- **Reduction of board meetings to 4 per year**

We are excited to share this redesign with you and eagerly anticipate how these changes will even better support the accomplishments and enhanced service quality of the organization in the years that follow. To the new WACOSA Board members introduced in this issue of the Buzz, we say, "Welcome to WACOSA! We are thrilled you are a part of the WACOSA team and know you will add much to the unfolding chapters of the WACOSA story".

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Steve Howard, Ed.D
Executive Director

Nancy Betts
Vice President of Quality Assurance and Programs

Beth Sueker
Operations Manager

Maggie Dilks
Human Resources Manager

Traci McKinnon
Finance Director

Roxanne Ryan Layne
Business Development

Carrie Abfalter
Fund Development Manager

Ann Kennedy
Sales & Marketing Director

Mary Rothstein
Sauk Centre Site Coordinator

Stephanie Schaefer
Senior Site Coordinator

Lynn Welle
Lead Client Manager

Board of Directors

Jeffrey Murphy
Chairman

LeRoy Northam
Vice Chairman

Ronald W. Brandenburg
Secretary

Jon Archer
Treasurer

Herb Trenz

Jeff Benveniste

Joe Perske

Karla Myres

Laura Krueger

Lindsey Rennie

Mollie Garden



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P.O. Box 757
Waite Park, MN 56387

The Reality of Virtual

Several years ago, my wife and I placed a harvest gold phone in our garage with a rotary dial so we could hear the phone ring while we were working outdoors. The old phone was just one of those relics many of us collect over the years, which we decided be put to good and, likely final, use. My daughter, who was 10 years old at the time, asked me to explain the function of this oddly shaped object and asked what the dial on the front of the box was used for. Was there a screen for Face Time? That same daughter has now finished college and is in her first year of her Master's studies at St. Cloud State University. She coaches me almost weekly through various glitches I just cannot seem to overcome when using my iPhone. Where does the time go or, as the great author Dr. Seuss once said, "How did it get so late so soon?"

This month's issue of the Buzz focuses on the extent to which many of our lives and futures are shaped daily by the reality of the virtual world. And, if the on-going thrust of technology wasn't moving fast enough, the impact of the current worldwide pandemic accelerated the learning curve even more, requiring each of us to assimilate such terms as Zoom, Google Meet and Microsoft Teams into our daily lexicons. It is safe to say then, that given the speed at which our world continues to advance, expecting this acceleration to accelerate even more is a likely scenario, one for which we should prepare, not only in the administration of WACOSA's services, but also in the skills we teach those we serve.

Since knowledge and preparation are key in making futures successful, WACOSA is taking steps to impart the knowledge necessary for those we serve to develop at least a basic understanding of the state-of-the-art technology needed to function in today's world. Once such skills were elective. Today, however, not so much. Individuals that experience barriers to employment and other aspects of daily living have struggled for centuries to be included in our community. Advances in technology are just one more potential threat to those we serve being marginalized, if we fail to evolve the training we provide. We must conclude that, if our communities become places that can only be accessed via an understanding of technology, learning these skills is critical to ensuring those we serve are not, once again, shut out.



WACOSA recently engaged the services of a Day Supports Coordinator with a passion and expertise for teaching WACOSA clientele the many facets of the technology-driven world. A recent grant awarded by the Morgan Family Foundation is making it possible to extend our training initiatives into new areas, including Videography and Editing. On-line/remote teaching through WACOSA's Connect Academy provides critical skill development for work and play through mediums such as Acting, Theater Appreciation, Adaptive Dance, Cooking, Virtual Job Exploration, Self-Advocacy, On-line Safety, Adaptive Media and Health and Wellness, to name a few.

The "new normal", to which it is so often referred these days, is still somewhat obscure. What remains clear is, what was once elective or even a luxury in terms of technological competence, is now a critical part of becoming fully engaged and fulfilled in our lives at work and play. Our collective future may represent uncertainty in many ways. Whatever happens, however, the future will doubtless rely upon a broad spectrum of ever-changing and progressively challenging technological advances. WACOSA is excited to be embracing the possibilities these new skills bring to those we serve. We invite you to share this excitement as we move WACOSA's efforts forward into a more techno-friendly future. Remember, there was a time when the pencil was an indispensable part of our daily arsenal of tools. Today, it is merely something stuck between the cushions of our couch. In the immortal words of Groucho Marx, never forget, "Time flies like an arrow; fruit flies like a banana". Hmmm, I may need to work on that. Until next time.....

Steve Howard

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Howard". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

WACOSA Executive Director

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.



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**CHANGING LIVES
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Shop with confidence, knowing your donations not only stay local, but also help support adults with disabilities. Our trainees learn important employment skills that prepare them for independence in our community.

WACOSA is an EEO/AA Employer. 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.

Policy Revision Notice For updated 245D Policies, please visit wacosa.org/client-services or contact us at 320-251-0087 to request a written copy.