

SPRING 2022

# THE BUZZ!

FOR ALL THINGS NEWSWORTHY AT WACOSA



# WACOSA WORKS!

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# EILEEN BEREZNI'S STORY

Everyone wants to feel important, valued, needed and productive, and for 14 years Eileen B. has been doing just that through her work at WACOSA. Eileen started by doing contract cleaning and assembly jobs for a few years with great success. She was then promoted to DocuShred, WACOSA's document destruction company.

Eileen's mother, Geri, said that they were so glad when Eileen was able to go back to work after the COVID-related closure in 2020. Geri shared that what Eileen enjoys the most about her time working at WACOSA is her supervisor, Teri O'Connell. "She talks about Teri this and Teri that. And Teri knows exactly what to do with Eileen, even when she gets a little out-of-sorts. Eileen also likes the paycheck!"

People with disabilities want to work but sometimes require additional assistance and specialized services. This is where WACOSA excels in fulfilling its core mission, by providing a wide range of life-enrichment activities and transformative work experiences that bridge the gap between a client's skills and the training needed to become employable.

Earning a paycheck is a life experience we should all have an opportunity to achieve. For many clients, it's not the amount of the check that makes them feel important but simply the fact that they work in a job that earned them a paycheck.

*"She talks about Teri this and Teri that. And Teri knows exactly what to do with Eileen, even when she gets a little out-of-sorts. Eileen also likes the paycheck!"*

- Eileen's message for WACOSA supporters



## TINA BESTE

# MEMORIAL SWING

WACOSA is thankful to the family of Tina Beste, a long-time WACOSA employee in the North Program area, for providing a bench swing for WACOSA's friends and family to enjoy. In the fall of 2021, Tina's friends, family and co-workers gathered at WACOSA to dedicate the swing in loving memory of Tina. Tina's legacy will live on in our North Program. The people we serve in that area enjoy being outside and are enjoying the new addition of the swing. A big thank you to the Beste family for your ongoing support of WACOSA and for honoring Tina in such a wonderful and meaningful way.



# JOHN'S CRAZY SOCKS

—A Model for Happiness

If you go to [johnscrazysocks.com](http://johnscrazysocks.com) you'll be impressed with a huge selection of, well, crazy socks! But what you'll quickly see is that they do a whole lot more than sell socks. WACOSA's Connect Academy's Right On class in February 2022 featured special guests John and Mark Cronin of John's Crazy Socks. The pair joined the class via Zoom for a fun and informative look at their journey of establishing an amazing company that employs people of all ability levels. John was born with Down Syndrome but that never slowed him, or his dreams, down. Not only does John run the largest sock company in the country, but he also gives back – bigtime. John's Crazy Socks has donated over \$475,000 since 2016 to various nonprofits, with the majority going to the Special Olympics.

In addition to these donations, they have scholarship funds and work with nonprofits that want to establish their fundraisers using John's Crazy Socks. John's Crazy Socks has one of the best mission statements I've seen. It's simply, "spread happiness". I can tell you after seeing their presentation, and following them on Facebook, they do exactly that every day.



## MEET

## DOUG KLOSS!

It's common to hear a friendly chuckle in the hallways as Doug, WACOSA's paper collecting expert, makes his way office to office collecting paper to be shredded. Doug, who has been with WACOSA for over 28 years, loves his job and takes great pride in his roles at WACOSA. In fact, given a choice, he would choose using his favorite backpack vacuum over most leisure or work activities. He does his work cheerfully and spreads that cheer, office by office.

Some WACOSA clients are at WACOSA for a very short time because they no longer need support, and others, like Doug, spend a lifetime. That lifetime at WACOSA has allowed Doug to have a wide variety of job opportunities, community connections, peer relationships, growth, and success. It isn't just Doug's growth that you get to witness. It's the growth of everyone who is lucky enough to know him. Doug signs and, due to that,

many WACOSA staff have learned to sign, even if they don't work directly with Doug; his personality makes you want to know him better.

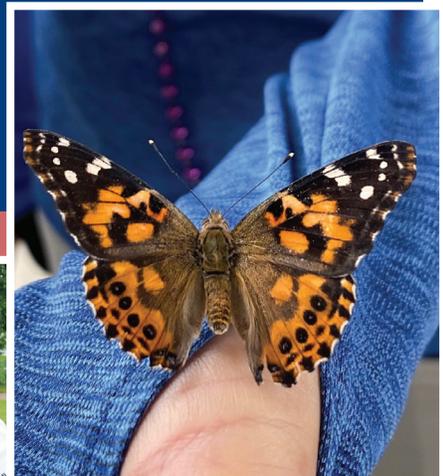
WACOSA works because the clients we serve help us develop an ever-changing, wide-ranging, menu of services that meet their individual goals, needs, and dreams. Doug teaches us that life presents all of us with a variety of challenges, yet, if we remain open to learning, those challenges will enhance our ability to enrich our lives. Together we are WACOSA strong.



# WORKIN' IT 1-5K

The 2021 5th Annual WACOSA's Workin' It 1-5K was the biggest and best to date! Over 100 of WACOSA's friends and family gathered at Lake George in St. Cloud, MN on August 7th, 2021 to enjoy a morning of fun, friends, and a great trip or two around Lake George. This year, WACOSA raised just over \$40,000 to help support WACOSA's mission to provide individuals with disabilities the opportunity to work and live in their community. This year featured a kickoff by the Color Guard, the Kiwanis Kiddie Parade, presentations by the

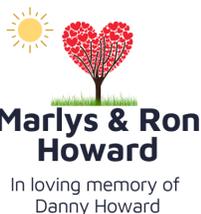
Sauk Rapids Storm Robotics Team, a helmet give away from the St. Cloud Police Department, the PAKRAT Bus, cars from The Pantowners – St. Cloud Antique Auto Club, and a visit from St. Cloud Rox's Chisel and more. One of the most moving moments of the 2021 event was a butterfly release honoring those we've lost. We would like to thank all of our sponsors, clients, staff and friends, and family that supported WACOSA's biggest fundraiser and get-together of the year!



## EVENT SPONSORS



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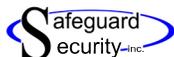
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When visitors enter the Great Hall at St. John's University (SJU), they are greeted by a large and stunning portrait of Jesus Christ, painted by Benedictine Monk Clement Frischauf in 1932. What you don't immediately realize is that next door, in The Refectory dining hall, over 1,600 hot meals are served to students, staff, monks, and priests daily, 365 days a year. A short walk away is Sexton Commons, a student center with a nice size café. What is so remarkable about this picture? The team that keeps these services operating is composed of over 25 people with various employment challenges hired directly by St. John's University and supported by job coaches employed by WACOSA.

Over 30 years ago, a relationship blossomed between SJU and WACOSA. This relationship developed around the shared mission of creating opportunities for individuals with disabilities while at the same time creating a richly diverse SJU campus. The eventual result was a partnership much richer than either side could have imagined. Little could the leadership of SJU know that they were hiring a driven and dedicated workforce who would ultimately become an indispensable part of the university's daily food service operations. Today, between the two dining locations, WACOSA workers keep food service lines running like a well-oiled machine. Each day sees WACOSA workers take the lead on such tasks as food preparation, custodial work, dish room operation, baking, cooking, serving, and a wide variety of other critical parts of SJU's hospitality services. Janet Despard, SJU's Director

of Dining and Events, shares "This program [WACOSA] is meaningful and important. Not only does it provide jobs for many wonderful associates with whom we get to work every day, but it provides visible representation in the workplace of people with different abilities. It represents our Benedictine values and reminds us of the inherent value and dignity of all people."

A notable part of the interaction between SJU personnel and the WACOSA hires is the impact the partnership has had on the whole of the workforce. Adria Gillitzer, SJU's Registered Dietitian and Administrative Manager, points out "Our student employees have shared how in awe they are with how their WACOSA teammates persistently overcome obstacles while gaining greater independence and contributing to the St. John's Community. It's truly inspirational to see firsthand how people from all backgrounds can work together to achieve a common goal." Julie Neuwirth, SJU's Sexton Dining Manager, adds, "The staff we have hired from WACOSA are always eager to work and always smiling. This positive daily attitude, in turn, has a definite positive impact on the other staff here. WACOSA hires remain vital members of our workforce at SJU; even more than members, they're family."

***"WACOSA staff are a vital part of our workforce here at SJU; they are family."***

*- Julie Neuwirth*

***“The job coaches are wonderful and provide helpful guidance and training to ensure that WACOSA employees have a good work experience and know how to do their jobs well.”***

*- Janet Despard*



When you watch WACOSA SJU hires, it is easy to see the pride they have in the jobs they do. They are eager to tell you about their responsibilities, how great their bosses and co-workers are, how much they enjoy interacting with students, and how much they appreciate earning a paycheck. When asked what they do with their money, WACOSA hires might tell you they are “saving it for a rainy day”, “spending it on hobbies” or even “taking a vacation somewhere in the world”. WACOSA hire, Sara K. reflects, “Working at SJU has taught me how to be a part of a team. Because of my job I get to travel to places like Florida and even Paris.” Almost every WACOSA worker hired by SJU that we spoke with praised their work team, pointing out how much they enjoy being treated as equals by their SJU colleagues. As we heard so many times throughout our conversations with workers, “Our co-workers and supervisors feel less like work associates and more like family members each day”.

Steve Howard, WACOSA's Executive Director, reflects, “For decades, SJU has played an important role in hiring our folks. They are a

major employer for us. We are thankful that they can see the many benefits employing differently-abled individuals brings to their workforce. Our collaboration with SJU is a wonderful example of how our WACOSA family of donors significantly impacts the individuals we serve. Donor support is just one of many things that help to fund WACOSA job coaches. This financial assistance keeps WACOSA job coaches going to SJU daily to support the WACOSA clientele the university hires. This team approach between SJU, WACOSA, and our amazing supporters is just one of many aspects that makes this partnership so effective.”

***“When I get to work in the morning, I always check for the WACOSA van. When it’s in the parking lot, I know that our dish room is staffed and we’re in good shape for the day.”***

*- Adria Gillitzer, RDN*



***“WACOSA workers come to work with a positive attitude and a smile on their faces. They are very responsible on showing up to work and are team players that get the job done.”***

*- Greg Schirmers*

# MOHR AWARD AMBER NORD

WACOSA is excited to announce that our very own Amber Nord received a state-level Direct Support Professional (DSP) Award from the Minnesota Organization for Habilitation and Rehabilitation (MOHR) in November 2021. The award was presented to Amber by Julie Johnson, President of MOHR.

"DSPs are the lifeline to services and supports for people with disabilities and we thank them," said award organizer and MOHR Board Member Lynne Megan. "There are amazing creative supports that are happening every day by DSPs across our state." Nord is receiving DSP honors for Greater Minnesota in the "Enrichment Focus" category.

"High among Nord's skillsets is an ability to listen to WACOSA clients' interests and prepare activities that increase their participation, teach new skills and recognize their abilities", explains Vice President of Quality Assurance and Programs, Nancy Betts. "She truly does everything with the clients' best interests

and capabilities in mind," said Betts. "Amber deserves to be recognized for her truly inspiring work with all people."

Both Amber Nord and Jamal Omer, another WACOSA DSP, were nominated for the Enrichment Award from MOHR. WACOSA is extremely proud of all the amazing DSPs, not only at WACOSA, but across the country, for the amazing work they do every day to create more opportunities for people of all ability levels.



## WACOSA LEGACY SOCIETY

Will planning is the highly personal process of deciding how your assets will be distributed after your lifetime. But your will can do so much more—it's not just a legal document to transfer your assets. Will planning is your chance to express your values and show your love to your family and favorite charitable causes. Regardless of your occupation, estate size, or income, you can leave a lasting legacy for the people and causes closest to your heart.

**As you create your will, carefully consider these important questions to personalize it:**

- How do I want to be remembered by my family and community?
- Are there causes I am passionate about, including WACOSA, that I want to recognize after my lifetime?

For more information, please contact Pat Flicker.

Email: [pflicker@wacosa.org](mailto:pflicker@wacosa.org) • Call: 320.257.5193 • Text: 320.760.976

# DONOR

## SPOTLIGHT



Our brother, Perry, needed a job. We tried various organizations but to no avail. Finally, we contacted the WACOSA team and because one individual would not give up, she found Perry a job at Partners Pub and Grill in Sartell. It was a life-changing event for Perry. They love his work there and he loves doing his job. He is a changed person because of it. This job has given him independence and self-reliance. Again, it was the determination of this one person from WACOSA to find Perry employment when no one else could. We will always be grateful to this individual and the WACOSA organization for the wonderful opportunity they found for Perry.

– The family of Perry Jarnot

# VOLUNTEER

## SPOTLIGHT

"A few months ago, Microbiologics was invited to be featured in WACOSA's Connect Academy Job Explorer's Class to showcase some of the jobs our company can offer in the community. I gladly volunteered to take the WACOSA team on a virtual tour of our facility! This was a rewarding opportunity for me because I felt it was important to show our partners at WACOSA how their critical assistance in assembling and labeling some of our components helps us to complete our bigger mission of "A safer, healthier world". I enjoyed getting to know our WACOSA teammates and answering their questions about Microbiologics – everyone was so enthusiastic and engaging! I want to give a big thank you to WACOSA. I had a lot of fun giving the virtual tour and meeting with everyone on Zoom!"

– Amanda Yasgar



If you or your business is interested in being a guest in a WACOSA Connect Academy Class contact Mike Nichols at [mnichols@wacosa.org](mailto:mnichols@wacosa.org)

# THANK YOU MCDOWALL!

WACOSA ThriftWorks! thrift store was recently the recipient of a generous donation from John and Cherie McDowall. This donation will make a significant impact on both people with disabilities and our environment. Thanks to John & Cherie's donation, ThriftWorks! was able to secure much-needed equipment that will ensure the safety of our staff and trainees. ThriftWorks! trainees learn social/emotional skills, retail skills, and skills to run various machines that help reduce waste in our environment and increase the number of recyclables that can be salvaged.

"John and Cherie have been such great supporters of WACOSA," says Steve Howard, WACOSA's Executive Director. "This donation to WACOSA will not only provide a new opportunity for our trainees, but has overall created a safer work environment for all of our staff and clients. It's a great day when a donor's gift not only affects those WACOSA serves but also affects our entire community by reducing the amount of waste in our landfills."



- Steve Howard, Ed.D**  
*Executive Director*
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*Vice President of Quality Assurance and Programs*
- Beth Sueker**  
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**Please send your full name and email address to [akennedy@wacosa.org](mailto:akennedy@wacosa.org) to get on our email list!**

### Policy Revision Notice

For updated 245D Policies, please visit [wacosa.org/client-services](http://wacosa.org/client-services) or contact us at 320-251-0087 to request a written copy.

### WACOSA is an EEO/AA Employer

WACOSA provides equal employment opportunities to all employees and applicants for employment and prohibits discrimination and harassment of any type without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, 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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**Waite Park, MN 56387**



## "CHALLENGE BUILDS TRUST"

Sitting on an airplane last week, I found myself so desperate to stem the tide of boredom that I was reduced to reading the back of the airsick bags, hoping to find something of interest to make the flight go faster. Eventually, I resorted to playing that old favorite game,

Solitaire on my iPhone. I'm generally not a fan of the game, but as I said, "Any port (or game) in the storm". As I began playing the game I was gratified to win my very first game. How exciting! Even better, by now my boredom was slowly abating. Again I played and again, I won. Amazing, I thought. Winning my third game, I became suspicious. OK, what's the deal? I've never been this lucky playing Solitaire in my life. Upon clicking into the menu, I quickly learned the game was set to win every time. There was no chance of failure. Without challenge, I did not wish to play anymore. Without challenge, for me, the game was over.

Whether we know it or not, the need to be challenged is inherent in everyone to one degree or another. Without it, we might find ourselves reading the airsick bags of life, never really feeling the full measure of what we might accomplish when "challenged" to do so. Working through challenging times provides each of us insight into ourselves. Unfortunately, if we're honest with ourselves, these are also the times when our shortcomings become evident. Truth be told, whether we like it or not, we must all eventually admit that not one person maintains all of the skills necessary to accomplish what we might in life. These are the times we must admit we need help. These are the times we must be willing to trust others.

In this month's issue of "The Buzz", we honor St. John's University (SJU), an exemplary institution in central Minnesota with whom WACOSA has

partnered successfully for over 30 years. There is, perhaps, no better example of the process of "challenge" building "trust" than the way SJU managers and supervisors challenge the WACOSA clients they hire each and every day. Over the years, SJU has hired dozens of WACOSA clients directly into its hospitality services as university employees. Many of these individuals began their employment in a particular job, eventually cross-training to fill other critical needs, growing their own skills, while increasing their value and usefulness to the university as well. As most of us will agree, accepting new challenges can be unnerving and even frightening. As a rule, it forces each of us to let go of what we find most familiar and embrace that which is outside our generally accepted comfort zone. This month, we salute St. John's University for seeing beyond who WACOSA clients are at the beginning of their employment, to the amazing professionals they can eventually grow to become as new challenges provide the opportunity to build both relationships and trust.

With the end of my own career in sight, I reflect back on almost 35 years of observing the evolution of employment services for the individuals we serve. In many ways, it has been a persistent struggle to educate prospective employers to see beyond individual barriers to appreciate the truly untapped resource those we serve present. In this month's Buzz, we tip our hat to St. John's University. Your willingness to challenge WACOSA clients to grow and dream is a success in the making, especially if a relationship built on trust is not far away.



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# SAVE THE DATES

*May 2nd, 2022, 4pm - 8pm*

WACOSA Pizza Ranch Fundraiser!

*August 6th, 2022*

Join us for 2022 WACOSA's Workin'  
It 1-5K event at Lake George,  
St. Cloud MN.

*June 11th, 2022, at 3pm*

Tech High School Performing Arts  
Center- WACOSA TheatreWorks'  
first time on-stage variety show.

Watch WACOSA's Facebook page  
or your email for more information  
on these upcoming event