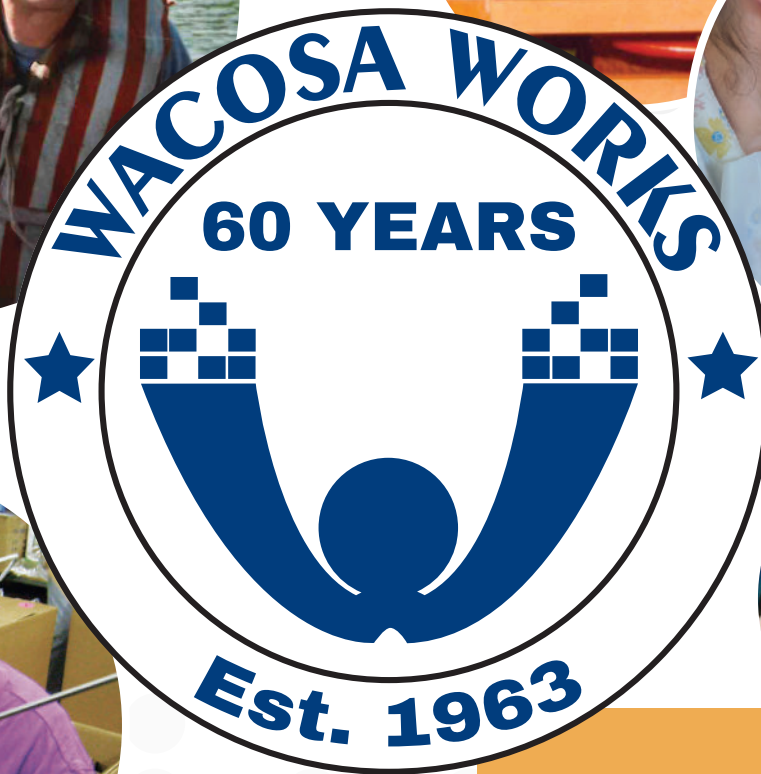


SPRING 2023

THE BUZZ!

FOR ALL THINGS NEWSWORTHY AT WACOSA



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THE HISTORY BEHIND

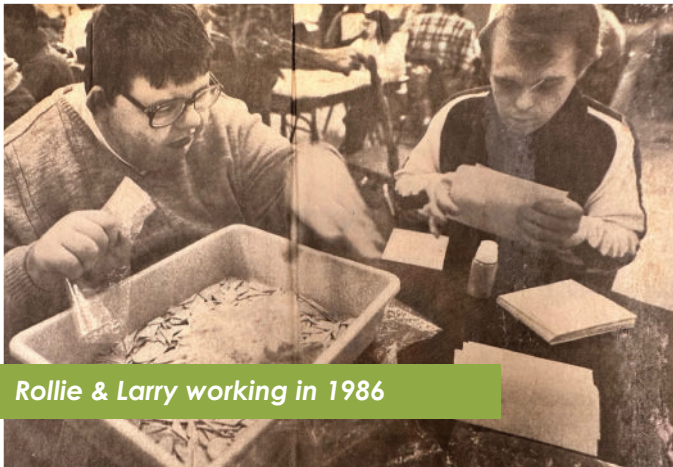
WACOSA

Betty Merten, a secretary, and Lu McNally, a teacher, were both busy mothers, and mothers of children with disabilities. WACOSA started out of necessity; these two mothers had things that needed to get done, and it wasn't always feasible to bring their children with them. Rollie Merten, Betty's son, was in a wheelchair, and there was very limited accessibility so Lu and Betty took turns watching each other's children. Like all good things, word got around. Soon Betty and Lu became community experts on caring for children with disabilities, as well as supporting and mentoring the parents of those children.

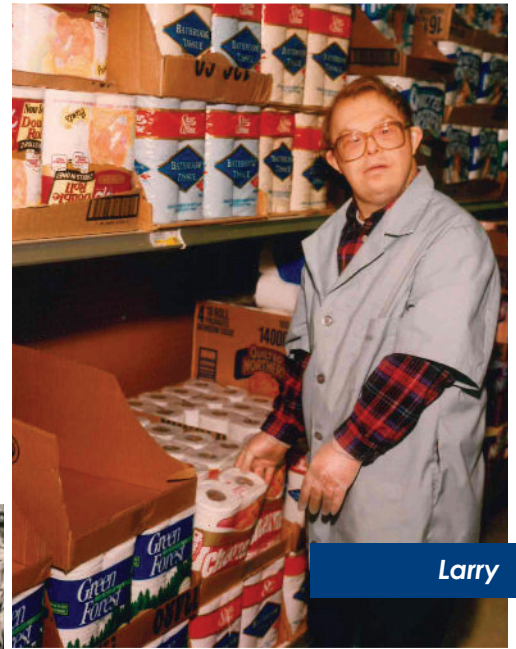
As more families got involved, they decided it was time to make the at-home support system into an actual community program. On March 28th, 1963, the St. Cloud Day Activity Center for Children was incorporated. The program had two staff and supported 22 children and adults. In the 70s and 80s, progress was made that allowed preschool and school-aged children with disabilities to attend public schools. In 1986, the name changed to WACOSA. *(See our full timeline on pages 4-5)*

The commitment and drive of these founding families to the entire disability community was tireless. Through their persistent advocacy not only for their own children but for all people with disabilities, they paved way for literally thousands of people to attend WACOSA and receive life-enriching services and support to help them reach their goals and dreams.

Over the past 60 years, we have been honored to have the support of many families, staff, volunteers, community partners, and supporters. We have grown from a 700-square-foot home to 6 locations, two business entities (DocuShred & ThriftWorks!) and providing adaptive services online to people unable to attend WACOSA in person. We simply would not have become what we are today without the dream and drive of two families who believed in their children. Without the continued support of our entire community we could not have continued their dream. Just like Betty and Lu, we know that given the right opportunities, people of all abilities can be empowered to reach their full potential.



Rollie & Larry working in 1986



Larry



Rollie

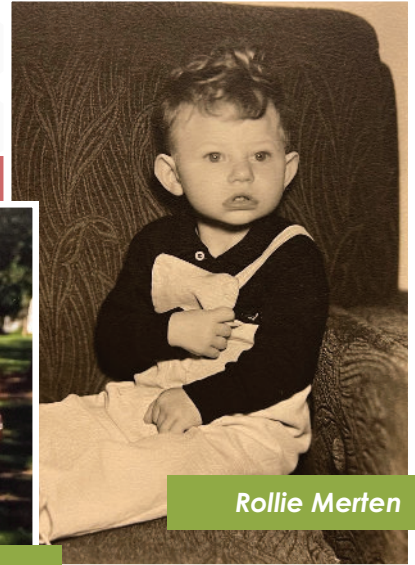
REMEMBERING

Rollie Merten

Chatting with Jeryl and Bruce Michaels, Rollie's sister and brother-in-law, it is easy to see the pride they have in their lifelong support of people of all abilities, but you can also sense the quiet strength they carry in knowing how they and their families helped establish what today is WACOSA. Rollie was blind, in a wheelchair and was diagnosed with spinal meningitis, but it didn't stop him from being a happy and beloved community member. Rollie had the gift to be able to understand the needs and wants of non-verbal peers. "I learned from Rollie," Jeryl confided, "He had no preconceived notions and only judged others based on how they treated people and by what was in their heart. He was like Peter Pan; he had no stress, accepted everyone, and was happy-go-lucky."



Betty, Leo, Rollie and Jeryl Merten



Rollie Merten

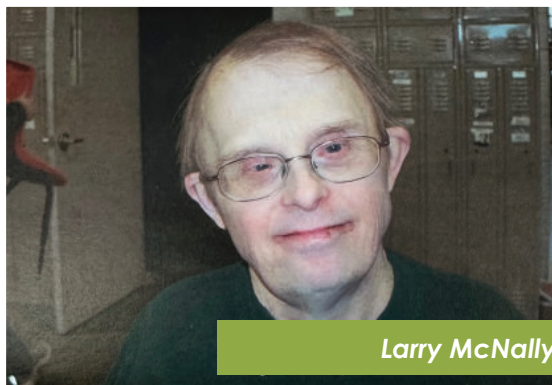
HONOR

Larry McNally

Doug McNally, Larry's older brother, remembers a simpler time when they were kids. In his neighborhood, his brother and another little girl both had disabilities, but they were included in all the neighborhood activities, like marbles, baseball, or Fox Lost the Trail, and all the kids were fiercely loyal to them. "This loyalty, of course, originated with my parents and permeated throughout our neighborhood," Doug shares. Larry, who attended WACOSA from childhood all the way through retirement, is now fully retired and enjoying life. Larry can identify almost any vehicle, enjoys biking and Frisbee, and maintains a strong passion for music. Larry and Doug even took the stage to sing Johnny Cash's Ring of Fire. Larry had many life enrichment and work opportunities at WACOSA and he still carries those memories with him today. Larry is quiet, but he always has a smile and kind words for anyone he meets.



Larry McNally



Larry McNally

CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY

1960'S

MARCH 28, 1963

WACOSA incorporated as St. Cloud Day Activity Center for Children.

22 children and adults received services for half days - nine months of the year.

The program was located at First Methodist Church in St. Cloud. There were 2 staff members and an annual budget of \$10,000.

1964

In Minnesota there were 6,035 individuals with developmental disabilities living in four state hospitals and a three year waiting list of 750 people.



1970'S

1972

Minnesota passed legislation for children ages 5 to 21 to receive public education.

1973

Name changed to Stearns County Day Activity Center (DAC).

1973

Federal Rehabilitation Act allocated money for supported employment of persons with developmental disabilities.

1973

29 children & 44 adults received services at Waite Park, Cold Spring & Sauk Centre locations.

10 full-time and 7 part-time staff ran the programs with an annual budget of \$70,528. Programming was for a 6-hour day for 9 months of the year.

1978

Name changed to Stearns County Developmental Achievement Center (DAC).



1980'S

1983

31 children & 72 adults received 175 full days of service at locations in St. Cloud, Sauk Centre & Cold Spring.

The annual budget in 1983 was \$493,232. The 3 programs were run by 30 full-time and 9 part-time staff members.

1985

WACOSA's pre-school programs ended as these services were taken over by the school district.

1986

Name changed to WACOSA (WA for Waite Park, CO for Cold Spring and SA for Sauk Centre).



1990'S

1990

WACOSA seniors began receiving services at Whitney Senior Center.

1990

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) enacted, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment, public service and public accommodations.

1990

There were still 1,344 people with developmental disabilities living in the Minnesota state hospital system.

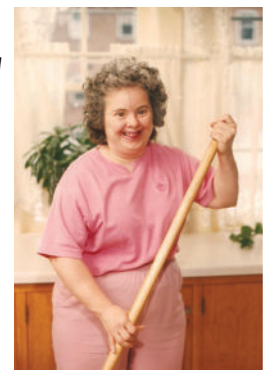
1991

WACOSA's Cold Spring site closed and consolidated with the Waite Park site.

1993

158 adults received program services at sites in Waite Park, St. Cloud and Sauk Centre.

There were 73 staff members in full- and part-time positions. The annual budget had grown to \$1,793,722.



CONTINUED...

2000'S

2000

WACOSA completed the addition to the Waite Park building and the program from St. Cloud moved to this site.

2003

Over 300 adults received services at 5 sites in central Minnesota for 240 days per year.

The annual budget was \$4,378,390, and WACOSA employed 106 staff members.

WACOSA partnered with over 200 businesses to provide work opportunities to clients.

2005

WACOSA purchased the 321 building, now referred to as the Annex.

2008

Kris Pflepsen retired after working at WACOSA for 36 years. Steve Howard was hired as the new Executive Director.



2020'S

2020

COVID pandemic shut down WACOSA for three months and changed how services were provided. WACOSA Connect Academy on-line classes began.

2022

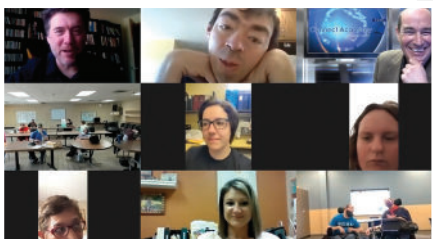
WACOSA provided services to 582 individuals in Sauk Centre, St. Cloud and Waite Park.
(Reduced from over 650 pre-COVID.)

The annual budget had grown to over \$8,500,000. WACOSA employed 128 full- and part-time staff.

(Reduced from over 175 pre-COVID)

2022

Steve Howard, WACOSA Executive Director, retired after working at WACOSA for 14 years. Nancy Betts was hired as the new Executive Director.



2010'S

2013

WACOSA opened ThriftWorks! store.

2013

WACOSA provided services to 575 individuals in Sauk Centre, St. Cloud and Waite Park.

The annual budget had grown to \$6,558,507.

WACOSA employed 154 full-time and part-time staff positions.

2018

WACOSA began services at our new First Ave. location in Waite Park. (Formerly Independence Center, Inc.)



DID YOU KNOW?

1964

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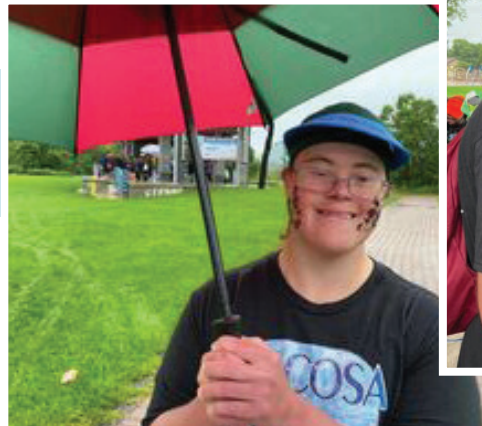


2022 WACOSA's

WORKIN' IT 1-5K

The 2022 6th Annual WACOSA's Workin' It 1-5k held true to tradition – it rained! The beautiful thing about WACOSA friends and family is that we won't let getting a little soggy ruin our fun. This year's event included the Color Guard leading the 1-5K, St. Cloud Police Department Canine Unit & helmet giveaway, DJ StephO, Caricatures by Jerimiah, a Memorial Butterfly release, and more. We wish to extend a thank you to our dedicated community sponsors, our generous donors, all those who gave their time to volunteer

at the event, and all our amazing attendees who make this event not only a success but so much fun! WACOSA raised over \$32,000 to help support our programs. Stay tuned for upcoming news about an all-new WACOSA event that is sure to be a lot of fun, and a lot drier!



EVENT SPONSOR



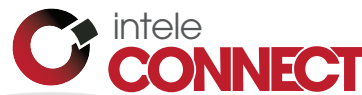
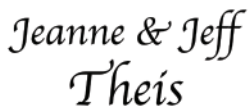
PLATINUM SPONSORS



GOLD SPONSORS



SILVER SPONSORS



BRONZE SPONSORS



APH RAISES \$352,000 for WACOSA

APH's annual fundraiser for WACOSA was recently held and all donations were once again matched by both APH and the Bartlett family, pushing this year's amount to \$352,000 and the ten-year grand total to nearly \$1.9 million.

To celebrate and recognize the many supplier partners who supported this year's fundraiser, John and Nancy Bartlett hosted a cocktail reception and lobster dinner at their home. The get-together culminated with a check presented to WACOSA.

"I am once again amazed by the support we've received, especially during yet another challenging year," said Corey Bartlett, president and CEO of APH. "Every dollar raised will go a long way towards advancing WACOSA's mission. Simply put, we couldn't be more proud of and thankful for our supplier partners."

The annual fundraiser is co-chaired by Jay Knopick, Action Sales + Marketing; Mark Hoffman, East Penn Manufacturing; John Oster, Tall Sales; Pat Ryan, NorthPro Representatives; Gary Stumm, WIX Filters; and Brad Johnson, N.A. Williams.



WACOSA at ROX BASEBALL



CONGRATULATIONS

to Sandie Westergren

Sandie Westergren, WACOSA's New Board of Directors Chair Person, is the HR Business Partner for Microbiologics in St. Cloud, MN. She has been in the HR field for 23 years, starting as an HR Assistant. She was the HR Director at WACOSA for four years and came back to join the WACOSA Board of Directors in 2021. Sandie currently lives in St. Cloud with her husband, Al, and their three dogs. She has two adult daughters and a grandson. When she isn't sitting around the bonfire in her free time, she is quilting or scrapbooking.



"I'm excited to have been chosen as the Board of Directors Chair for WACOSA because I strongly believe in the mission and vision of our organization. I'm also honored to get to work closely with the Executive Director, Nancy Betts, and her team. Together I know that we will accomplish great things in 2023 and beyond. "

– Sandie Westergren

CONGRATULATIONS

to Jennifer Johnson

Jennifer Johnson, WACOSA's New Board of Directors Vice Chairperson, has been an owner of the corporate adult foster care business, Quality Care Services, Inc. (QCS) since August of 2002. QCS provides residential services to individuals diagnosed with varying developmental disabilities in the St. Cloud area. She grew up in St. Cloud, graduated from Apollo High School, then attended the University of Minnesota Duluth and earned a degree in Early Childhood Special Education in June of 1999. Jennifer's passion and dedication to serving individuals with special needs has been a lifetime in the making as she grew up with two inspiring uncles, Mike and Dan Pollreis both with Down Syndrome, and her Grandma Betty, advocating for rights and opportunities for all. Mike and Dan were fortunate to work at WACOSA for most of their adult lives, making friends, learning skills, and earning a paycheck! Jennifer has served on the WACOSA Board intermittently since November of 2004. She is the Chair on the Program Committee and is looking forward to her new role as Vice Chairperson on the WACOSA Board, continuing to

be a part of the WACOSA mission creating possibilities for all abilities. Jennifer lives in Sartell with her husband, Brian, and two sons, Carter and Ray. She enjoys spending time with her family and attending all their sports and activities.



"Since I've intermittently served on the WACOSA Board beginning in November of 2004, I have had the honor and privilege of serving under the leadership of Kris Pfeepsen, Steve Howard, and currently Nancy Betts. I am looking forward to the future of WACOSA and excited to be a part of the 60th Anniversary celebration-"celebrating 60 years of creating possibilities for all abilities!"

– Jennifer Johnson

CONGRATULATIONS

to Peggy Bayer

Please help us welcome the newest member of the WACOSA Board of Directors, Peggy Bayer. Peggy, a New London, MN native, got her degree at the St. Cloud Hospital School of Nursing. Peggy spent 35 years in the nursing field at Paynesville Area Hospital, with the last twelve years in management of Outpatient Services/OR. Peggy's 2017 retirement has allowed her to focus on her hobbies, such as gardening, walking, and biking. Peggy is married and has three sons and two grandchildren. Peggy's oldest son, Matt, has been a client of WACOSA for 18 years. Since retiring, Peggy has realized her dream of working part-time for a floral and greenhouse business in Paynesville, MN. Peggy has also traveled to Cambodia multiple times with a mission team who educates families on human trafficking and has another mission trip planned in 2023.

We thank Peggy for joining our mission of providing individuals with disabilities the opportunity to work and live in their community.



We asked Peggy why she chose to serve on the WACOSA board, and she shared, "I believe that everyone is called to serve. I'm passionate about WACOSA and the services they provide to people with different abilities. WACOSA has helped contribute to Matt's self-worth and gives him a sense of community involvement."

– Peggy Bayer

WACOSA

PLANNED GIVING

WACOSA has done so much good, for so many people, for such a long time with an unparalleled legacy that runs deep and wide.

As we celebrate and remember those early pioneers who worked tirelessly to create programs when no other services were available, we must remain diligent in our efforts to ensure the WACOSA mission will continue to thrive. Legacy giving is one more way to significantly impact services for current and future generations of individuals with disabilities.

You can touch the lives of many and leave a mark of lasting value, regardless of your occupation, estate size or income level. How? By naming WACOSA as a full or partial beneficiary in your will or trust, life insurance policy, bank accounts, retirement fund, IRA or by creating a Named Endowment Fund to perpetually honor and remember a loved one.

To request a copy of ***"How WACOSA Helps People with Disabilities Successfully Work and Live in Our Communities"***

or start a conversation about estate planning, please contact Pat Flicker at **pflicker@wacosa.org or 320.257.5193**

NANCY BETTS' LETTER



As anniversaries go, 60 years is a huge accomplishment. March 28, 2023 marks 60 years of supporting people with disabilities in our communities. I often wonder how our founders would reflect on what

their grassroots efforts built: the countless planning meetings at their kitchen tables, families helping families, making time and financial sacrifices, figuring out solutions to what might have seemed to be unsolvable problems, and fundamentally wanting nothing more for their loved ones to be a part of a thriving community. They would see thousands of people served in multiple cities and locations and the expansion and addition of different programs to meet the diverse needs of everyone. They established WACOSA with the goal of breaking down the barriers that prevent people with disabilities from participating fully in society. The legacy of those efforts has endured for decades, and every person who was served here, worked here, or volunteered here has a story to tell.

Some of those stories start like this... A person comes into my office clutching an envelope and beaming proudly as they show me the paycheck they earned. Or the call I get from a sibling of a person who reluctantly participated in a few painting classes to thank us for the opportunity given to their brother. As a result of those classes, his ability to verbally express himself with his family has grown tremendously.

I have the privilege of listening to someone tell me their dreams, and WACOSA gets

to support their efforts to reach for them. Some stories start with small moments like someone being able to stand up from their wheelchair independently for a few seconds, or someone else learning how to maneuver a computer mouse independently. Some are sagas that span long-awaited opportunities, like watching someone learn more and more skills at ThriftWorks!, or seeing the joy on a face when they discover a new talent during our art classes. I have had the thrill of walking into a store and being greeted by someone thriving at a job in the community, and also attending a theatre production completely written, rehearsed, and presented to an audience by a team of clients, staff, and volunteers. As I look back at all these personal stories that WACOSA has helped to accomplish, it is easy to see the endless possibilities of tomorrow and for years to come.

As we celebrate the 60th anniversary of WACOSA, I would like to take a moment to recognize the remarkable achievements of those served and to thank the dedicated families, staff, and volunteers who have made it all possible. Their unwavering commitment to the individuals we serve has been an inspiration and has helped to create a world that is more inclusive, supportive, and accessible for people with disabilities.

We are proud to carry on the legacy our founders began 60 years ago at their kitchen tables, and as we look forward to the next few decades I can't wait to see all the stories, big and small, to come.

Would you like to receive the newsletter and other WACOSA communication via email?

Please send your full name and email address to akennedy@wacosa.org to get on our email list!

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.

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Nancy Betts

Executive Director

Bill Brinker

Facilities & Fleet Manager

Maggie Dilks

Human Resource Manager

Pat Flicker

Development Manager

Ann Kennedy

Sales & Marketing Director

Traci McKinnon

Finance Director

Mary Rothstein

Program Director

Lynn Welle

Program Director

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Sandie Westergren

Chair

Jennifer Johnson

Vice Chair

Ronald W. Brandenburg

Secretary

Jeff Benveniste

Treasurer

Peggy Bayer

Matt DesJardins

Curt Gainsforth

Mollie Garden

Laura Krueger

Thad Olsen

Joe Perske

Lindsey Rennie

Herb Trenz



**310 Sundial Drive
P.O. Box 757**

Waite Park, MN 56387

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.



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SAVE THE DATE

Join us for our Open House Bash!

Saturday, August 5th, 2023 from 3pm – 6pm

WACOSA's 60th Anniversary Bash

- Jimmy Z's food truck
- Music by Retro
- Silent Auction
- WACOSA's very own beer & soda!

At Back Shed Brewing 624 Sundial Drive in Waite Park

**60th WACOSA
Anniversary
Bash**



BACK SHED
BREWING

Watch our website or your email for more information.