

THE BUZZ!

FOR ALL THINGS NEWSWORTHY AT WACOSA

SUMMER
2024





Welcome to Spring!

In this WACOSA Buzz issue, I am excited to share stories of our recent activities and the resulting impacts that have been made possible by your generosity and support. Stories like our Ambassadors for Respect project, where our

trained Ambassadors met with local 4th graders to discuss how to prevent bullying. From the milestones people like Alex Miller have reached in their lives, to the advocacy work with Legislators at our State Capitol (check out that great cover photo :D!), where each narrative is a testament of our collective ongoing efforts.

WACOSA's work with our community partners to bring new and innovative activities to the people we serve is ever evolving and challenges us to look outside of the familiar and try new things. I think Spring is the universal prompt to freshen things up, embrace new experiences, and learn more from our communities.

A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE

Take for example the work happening on a new stage production with our partner, the Paramount Center for the Arts. This play will be performed for our families and friends this June and is a great kick off to Granite City Days in St. Cloud. Please plan on attending; you never know who might pop up in our production!

Our decades-long partnership with Bernick's had our work crew moving into a brand-new building this spring! This will allow crew members access to a more technologically updated process to fulfill vending machine orders, and they are excited for the new space.

You can also sample a poem or two from recently published books authored by our participants, in collaboration with Cowtipping Press.

As you can see, Spring does provide that vision of renewal and excitement for all the happenings at WACOSA. Here's to a new season filled with growth, joy, and endless possibilities!

With sincere gratitude,

Executive Director

SAVE THE DATE!

Empowered Stars Presents: **BEANS! A Granite City Wild West Sing-Along**

Join us for an Empowered Stars Play, a collaboration between Paramount Center for the Arts & WACOSA.

This event will kick off the 2024 St. Cloud Granite City Days and is free to the public.

Please bring a nonperishable food item, like BEANS, to be donated to the Catholic Charities Food Shelf.

06 - 27 - 2024



WHEN

10:30 am
Thursday, June 27th, 2024

WHERE

Paramount Center for the Arts
913 W St Germain St.
St Cloud, MN 56301

SAVE THE DATE!

WACOSA 2024 BASH!

Italian Food Buffet, Live Music by Retro, Silent Auction, & more!

09 - 14 - 2024

WHEN

3 pm — 6 pm
Saturday, September 14th, 2024

WHERE

Moose Lodge in Waite Park
1300 3rd St N, Waite Park, MN 56387



WACOSA HIGHLIGHTS

Sometimes you meet people who just know where they are in the world, not only figuratively, but literally. Alex Miller, who has been with WACOSA since 2012, is one of those people. His mom, Jill told me that Alex can go anywhere once, and he knows exactly how to get there from then on. His memory and detail recall, even going back to being a toddler, is exceptional. I immediately got that sense from Alex when I met with him to get information for this story; detailed, organized, confident, and kind.



Back in 2012, when Alex started, his confidence wasn't where it is today. Alex was hesitant to participate in an external crew opportunity at a local business. Once Alex began that crew and realized success, he was eager to do more. Soon, Alex had multiple community crew jobs and wanted more. When the opportunity arose for

Alex to participate in the WACOSA ThriftWorks! thrift store training program, Alex jumped at the chance for new growth.

Alex continued to learn and grow during his time at ThriftWorks! Lisa Anderson, ThriftWorks! Program Manager, shares, "When I asked Alex to do something, I knew it would be done in a highly organized manner; Alex pays great attention to detail." Alex was soaring when COVID-19 hit and everything stopped for everyone.

Once Alex was able to start coming back to WACOSA, he found himself spending more time there versus working out in the community. Alex was feeling restless; we all were feeling restless. During this time Alex started creating artwork. Alex confides, "There were four reasons for my sudden interest in art. First, there was COVID, and I had nothing to do. Second, we live in Minnesota where we get like three months of summer and then we are stuck inside. Third, it helps me to reduce stress and anxiety. When I draw, I just find my patience through breathing. Fourth? Well, my art is

good, and people want it, so I give them out as Christmas gifts."

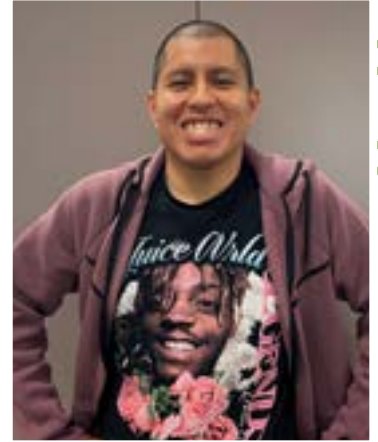
Finally, the world started to open more, and Alex was eager to get back on the journey of finding his own job, not working at WACOSA, or for a crew, but his own job out in the community. Alex was hired at a shoe store at the Crossroads Mall.

Alex's responsibilities include stocking inventory, window displays, and keeping the store clean and orderly for the customers. Alex loves his job and says his employers like the work he does for them. "I just know that the reason I know how to do things like cleaning windows or keeping things organized is because those are the exact things I learned from working with WACOSA," Alex shares.

As Alex pulls out some of his artwork to share with me, both photographic and drawings, I can literally see the pride he takes in the work he does. Each piece is meticulously placed in a sheet protector and then in a three-ring binder. The art is beautiful, and we both take some time to enjoy the images he has created. We talk a little about the future and where Alex sees himself. "I like what I do now, but if anything, I'd like to have my own store selling my art," I don't know what Alex's future will look like, but

I have no doubt that it will be exactly what Alex wants it to be because WACOSA will be here to support him, and he believes so strongly in himself.

ALEX MILLER



WACOSA HIGHLIGHTS

MOSAIC – WACOSA ART



DAVE WILLIAMSON

Dear Future Self

I hope you're in sportscasting in California for the Lakers
I hope you're living in an apartment with a ramp
Maybe you'll be old and have a white beard.

If I was a Piece of Gum

A piece of gum got stuck on my wheel
I picked it up
I put it in a Kleenex
And threw it away in the garbage.

OUTREACH

When you enter Bernick's new 36,000-square-foot building in Waite Park, MN, you begin to see the scope of the vending division of the over 100-year-old family business. Kori Peterson, Full Line Warehouse Supervisor for Bernick's vending division, showed me around the facility, including the new technologies and enhancements that streamline their operations.

What isn't as immediately apparent is the 3,800 square foot cooler, the 1,800 square foot freezer, or the amazing WACOSA team that works within those cool walls. For over 20 years, Bernick's has employed a WACOSA crew to help with picking vending orders and has assisted in several other divisions within Bernick's as well. In the past 15 years, over 140 WACOSA jobholders have worked over 110,000 hours at Bernick's.

A WACOSA Crew, a group of WACOSA workers and a supervisor, work at Bernick's five days a week. The crew is fully integrated within Bernick's and are considered

by co-workers to be an essential part of the team. Nancy Betts, WACOSA Executive Director, adds, "We are incredibly proud of the hard work that our folks do for Bernick's. Like many of our employer partners, they understand the incredible value that each person brings to the workforce and culture of their organization."

As I attempted to interview the WACOSA Crew, I quickly realized that I was slowing them down. They had orders to fill. The group takes the task very seriously and as Rebecca, a crew worker, pointed out, "I'm too busy for an interview; I have money to make so I can save it up!"

BERNICK'S



"We appreciate our WACOSA crew that picks cold food for our vending drivers. They take pride in the work they do, and we rely on them to meet our goals each day. It is our pleasure to have this team fulfill a vital role in our organization."

– Lindsay Hermans-Miller



WACOSA currently has 27 crews that work throughout central Minnesota.

It is no secret that bullying is an ongoing and increasing issue in classrooms throughout the country. In fact, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics, one in five students report being bullied. Of those, the most common reports for the reason behind the bullying include disability, race, appearance, religion, or sexual orientation. People who have been bullied are at increased risk for depression, anxiety, sleep difficulties, lower academic achievement, and dropping out of school. It's a real issue with real consequences for those who have been victimized by a bully.

In March 2024, WACOSA was invited by Ambassadors for Respect to have adults with disabilities, served by WACOSA, come into a 4th-grade classroom and become an Ambassador by sharing what effects bullying had on them. Each Ambassador goes through a training program and, once trained, they present their experiences to students. The Ambassadors for Respect program creates a win/win opportunity for both the Ambassador and the students. The Ambassador gets to tell their story and teach students while earning an income for their time presenting. This can be therapeutic since in some cases it is the first time they've had the opportunity to carefully think through the bullying they have experienced in their life, and then learn

AMBASSADORS FOR RESPECT



how to share that story in a meaningful way to an audience that is eager to listen and learn.

The award-winning Ambassadors for Respect (A4R) Program, started in 2013, brings individuals with developmental disabilities into 4th-grade classrooms to teach students to include others, to use Person First language, and to advocate for themselves and others. In collaboration with the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, the purpose of the program is to develop the self-advocacy of individuals with developmental disabilities and to initiate or strengthen school bullying prevention efforts.

A big thank you to Ambassadors for Respect, PeaceMaker Minnesota, and the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities for making this program possible. Also, thank you to St. Cloud School District 742, Ambassador Coaches Autumn, Heather, and Janet, and finally, thank you to WACOSA Ambassadors Hannah, David, Julie, George, Sarah, Robin, Rachel & Katrina.



DISABILITY SERVICES DAY



WACOSA brought a team to the State Capitol in March for the annual Disability Services Day. Our WACOSA advocates met with our local representatives to advocate and interview them on their stance regarding funding for disability services. Our advocacy team focused on increasing funding so that Direct

DAY AT THE CAPITAL

Are you interested in advocating for disability services?

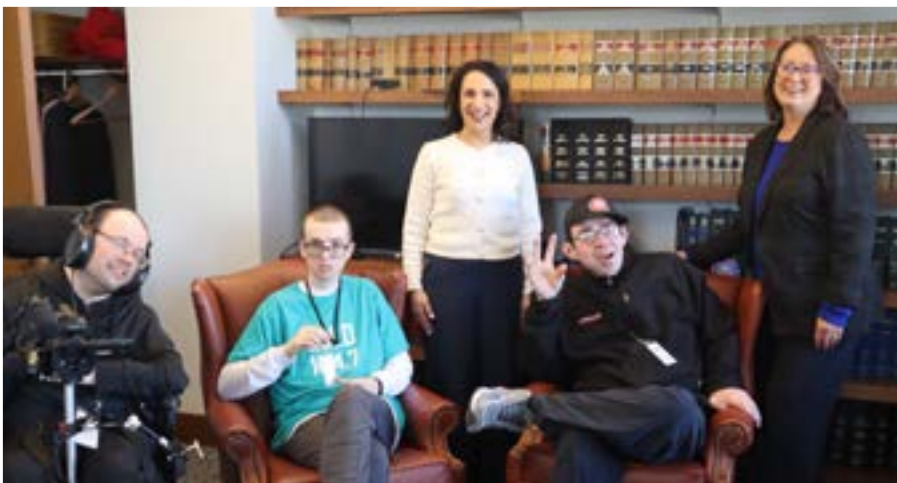
Reach out to your representative team!

To find out who represents you, you can visit

***gis.lcc.mn.gov/iMaps/districts/* and type in your address.**

Support Professionals, statewide, are paid a fair wage for the incredibly vital role they play in supporting and caring for people with disabilities, along with individual advocates' specific concerns.

The WACOSA advocates had the opportunity to meet with and/or interview Senators Aric Putnam and Jeff Howe, as well as Representatives Lisa Demuth, Tim O'Driscoll, Bernie Perryman, Mary Franson, Paul Anderson, and Dan Wolgamott. It was a productive day discussing issues that were important to the advocates.



SPOTLIGHTS

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

WACOSA deeply resonated with me for two reasons. Firstly, their commitment to providing meaningful activities and fostering self-respect in individuals with disabilities truly embodies the spirit of inclusion and empowerment. As a society, we have a fundamental responsibility to support all individuals in reaching their full potential, and WACOSA goes above and beyond to fulfill that duty.

Secondly, on a personal level, WACOSA's ThriftWorks! store provided invaluable assistance during a difficult time. When my wife passed away, the store offered a convenient and meaningful way to donate her belongings. Knowing that her items would benefit others brought me comfort and eased the burden of the situation.

Witnessing WACOSA's positive impact firsthand, both on the community and on individuals facing challenges, has inspired me to become a regular donor. I am deeply appreciative of their dedication and encourage you to consider supporting their incredible work as well.

MARK THELEN



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



LYNN JENSEN

After I retired, I discovered I wasn't very good at it. I decided that I needed to find something to do that was useful and meaningful. I looked at various agencies that needed volunteers and came across the WACOSA website. I discovered WACOSA's ThriftWorks! program. It seemed like a perfect fit, and it was. I support their mission and could put my skills to work.

I volunteer 4-5 days a week doing whatever needs to be done that day. My favorite thing to do is to sort, price, and display the jewelry. Sometimes I even find something great! I recommend volunteering to anyone!

LEADERSHIP TEAM

- Nancy Betts**
Executive Director
- Traci McKinnon**
Finance Director
- Lynn Nicholson**
Human Resources Manager
- Ann Kennedy**
Sales & Marketing Director
- Lynn Welle**
Program Director
- Mary Rothstein**
Program Director

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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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LEGACY GIVING

CREATE A LASTING LEGACY WITH WACOSA

Leave a meaningful and lasting impact on future generations of individuals with a disability by including WACOSA in your will. It's a powerful way to continue supporting the causes you care deeply about, even after you're gone.

**For more information,
please reach out to us at**
donate@wacosa.org
or call 320.251.0087

FLEXIBILITY IN YOUR GIVING

- *Donate a specific dollar amount: This ensures a clear, fixed contribution to WACOSA.*
- *Dedicate a percentage of your estate: This allows your gift to adapt to future fluctuations in your assets.*
- *Donate a specific asset: You can designate an IRA, stock, or other valuable possession.*

POTENTIAL TAX BENEFITS

Gifts to charities in your will may be tax-deductible, potentially reducing your estate's tax burden. However, consulting a tax professional is crucial to understanding the specific benefits in your situation.

Make your mark on the world. Whether you choose WACOSA or another cherished cause, remember that your generosity can positively impact lives for generations to come.

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