

THE BUZZ!

FOR ALL THINGS NEWSWORTHY AT WACOSA

SPRING/SUMMER 2026



SERVING UP OPPORTUNITY: OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH MEXICAN VILLAGE



– Eldon B.

For nearly 50 years, the Mexican Village has been a staple dining experience in downtown St. Cloud, known for its Mexican dishes and warm, inviting atmosphere. For 30 of those 50 years, there has been another staple quietly helping make that experience possible: Eldon B., a proud and dedicated employee of Mexican Village.

The average diner may not meet Eldon, he works behind the scenes during the lunch rush to ensure every customer has the best possible experience. Eldon takes tremendous pride in his role helping keep Mexican Village a clean and welcoming place to eat. His work includes the dish room, folding laundry, vacuuming, and other cleaning duties that keep everything running smoothly.

***“You’ve got to have a clean place!
No one wants to eat at a dirty restaurant,
and here we keep it clean.”***

Eldon's favorite part of his job is the people he works with though the free lunch doesn't hurt either. (He recommends the Durango.)

“I always say I wish I had more Eldons,” shares Holly Binsfeld, manager at Mexican Village. “He is consistent, on time, and I always know I can count on him. Everybody here loves him.”

Eldon works with WACOSA job coach Pam Lee, and their easy banter reflects a long relationship built on trust. Pam checks in to see how Eldon is doing and to remind him to stay safe especially since he rides his bike across town to work whenever the weather allows.

“Eldon and so many WACOSA workers can be a huge asset to businesses,” Pam says. “Eldon is proud of his work, great at it, and incredibly reliable. He’s also helped create a welcoming culture that the staff truly appreciate.”

When Eldon isn't working, he enjoys collecting cans to help keep his community clean, riding his bicycle,

and creating original artwork using a weaving technique. It's impossible not to feel happier in Eldon's presence—he brings that kind of joy with him.

Eldon is a wonderful example of the impact of organizations like WACOSA. He works, has a social life, and creative outlets, supported by a team that adapts as his needs change. Through every season, WACOSA remains in the background—supporting, encouraging, and celebrating each success, big or small.



Job Coach Pam Lee & Eldon



Eldon shares his artwork



– Amy H.

At WACOSA, we believe in the power of meaningful employment as one of the foundations for independence, confidence, and community connection for adults with disabilities. Stories like Amy's prove that when businesses prioritize inclusive hiring and are open to creative solutions like job carving, everyone wins. It's a key part of our mission, and we love sharing the incredible partnerships that make it happen.

During a recent visit to Plato's Closet, our team had the opportunity to sit down with Amy and learn more about her employment journey. Walking into Plato's Closet in St. Cloud, the first thing you notice is the cheerful energy. Happy voices greet you, and friendly staff are buzzing around the sales floor.

Amy, who has been working in partnership with WACOSA for 17 years and has been employed with Plato's Closet for

nearly five years, is a wonderful example of what happens when a business opens its doors to people of all abilities. She worked directly with WACOSA's Community Employment team to build essential skills and confidence, ultimately leading her to meaningful employment here.

The Power of Job Carving

Amy greets us with a warm smile and leads us to the back room, where she is currently focused on tagging and hanging clothes. Amy works four days a week, making sure the floor is well-stocked and ready for the daily flocks of shoppers.

The partnership with Plato's Closet began in 2019 when Mollie Garden, owner, first connected with WACOSA about hiring an adult with disabilities. Mollie quickly realized that job carving was the key to making this a successful employment experience for everyone involved. (Job carving is the process of customizing a job by breaking tasks into smaller responsibilities that match an employee's strengths and abilities while meeting the needs of the business.)

Mollie shared her simple but brilliant approach: "I think it's just broadening your horizons or breaking down the tasks that you want done on a day-to-day basis. So, it's being open to maybe breaking down a whole job into just smaller pieces and then disseminating those out to match the skillset of a person from WACOSA."

By working directly with WACOSA's Job Coaches, they successfully matched Amy's skills with the best fit within the organization.

Building Relationships and Confidence

Amy shared that the best part about working at Plato's Closet is the relationships that she has with her co-workers; they truly fulfill her. When we asked Amy what she is good at, she stated, without hesitation, that she is a good coworker and friend.

Kira Hannah, Plato's Closet's Manager, who can hear our conversation, chimes in from the other room: "Amy is a great friend to others at work, she is kind and helpful and always willing to pitch in." Amy nods in agreement, it is clearly who she is.

Kira confirmed the success of the partnership, stating, "We've had great luck with the WACOSA team helping us to make sure that people are a good fit for us, and that we are a good fit for them."

The WACOSA Support System

Amy contributes her success at Plato's Closet to the incredible support of her co-workers and management, as well as the leadership she gets from WACOSA Job Coach, Pam.

At the beginning of Amy's employment, Pam worked with both Amy and Plato's Closet to understand Amy's job responsibilities. Pam worked

*"Amy is a great friend to others at work,
she is kind and helpful and always
willing to pitch in."*

alongside Amy during the training period and then stepped back once both Amy and Plato's Closet felt that Amy was ready to fly solo.

"I'm still here for Amy and Plato's Closet," Pam states. "I stop in and see how things are going, and they both know I'm a phone call away if there needs to be more training, new responsibilities, or to work through any potential concerns that might arise."

Future Dreams and Fun

When Amy isn't working, her favorite things are swimming and hanging out with her close friends and family. She enjoys spending a little of her paycheck on a great meal or a delicious smoothie!

Amy has some big future plans. She really wants to help other people with their own mental health and is currently working on writing her own story to inspire others.



Job Coach Pam Lee & Amy

Like Mollie and Kira at Plato's Closet, your business can benefit from the loyalty, dedication, and talent of a WACOSA employee. We'll help you explore successful strategies like job carving and provide ongoing support to ensure a successful, long-term match.

Learn more about directly hiring through WACOSA by contacting us at info@wacosa.org or 320-251-0087.

Join us for the 2026 WACOSA Bash on October 3 from 3–6pm at the Moose Lodge in Waite Park!

This year's theme, "Space for Everyone," celebrates the belief that every person deserves a place to belong, grow, and thrive. The Bash is one of our most joyful traditions—bringing our community together in support of adults with disabilities across central Minnesota. Sponsorships help make this special event possible and fuel programs that create connection, opportunity, and inclusion.

Together, we can ensure there is truly space for everyone.

2026 WACOSA Bash Sponsorship Levels

Neighbor - \$100

*Sponsorship level is for non-corporations.
Includes recognition on event promotions and program.*

Friend - \$250

Recognized on T-shirt, program, & public advertising

Advocate - \$500

Includes all Friend level recognitions + event banners includes free event tee shirt.

Champion - \$1,500

Includes all Advocate level recognitions + event banners

Visionary - \$3,000

Includes all Champion level recognitions + event booth



To learn more or
to sponsor -
scan code or visit



wacosa.org/sponsorship



"BEE" THE CHANGE YOU WISH TO SEE



WACOSA and with the people we serve has been such an enriching experience and the individuals I have worked with have helped me shape the direction I want to go in as an educator in and out of the classroom, and how the connection between K-12 and places like WACOSA may be different or similar and how to potentially move forward within the system to make the future stronger.

At WACOSA, our mission is driven by the powerful relationships between our staff and the individuals we serve, a connection beautifully illustrated by Peyton Herges, one of our Direct Support Professionals. In this interview conducted by Ann Kennedy, Marketing Director for WACOSA, Peyton reflects on her journey since arriving at WACOSA two years ago seeking hands-on experience — a journey she couldn't have predicted would shape her so deeply. Today, she celebrates her graduation with a cap covered in colorful “bumblebees,” each a fingerprint from the individuals she supports — her clients — who continue to shape her journey.

How long have you been at WACOSA, Peyton?

Peyton: I have been at WACOSA for 2 years.

What was the inspiration behind having the WACOSA clients decorate your graduation cap? What does it symbolize to you?

Peyton: The inspiration behind having the clients decorate my cap was centered around the question that everyone gets at some point: “Why did you choose this field?” and while we all have endless stories and can write numerous essays about the reasons why, I decided to showcase the reasons why not only I chose this field but also why I love it so much.

I wanted to honor and showcase the people who have been integral to my journey. Working at

The quote I put on my cap, “Be The Change You Wish To See,” has resonated with me throughout my time at WACOSA and in general, as change is sparked by actions, even the small ones, over time. With WACOSA, the change happens every single day with both our clients and staff through not only our overall mission but also through everyday successes and challenges we may face.

Can you describe the experience of working with the clients on the graduation cap? Did you give them guidance? Are you working directly with them?

Peyton: Working with them on this design has been a wonderful experience! Before we started, I explained the purpose behind the project, and once I had explained, they were very eager to participate. I gave each person guidance on the location of their print on the cap and guided them through the process of how it would turn out.

Is there a specific decoration or design element from one of the clients that holds a special meaning for you? Why?

Peyton: The design element that holds a special meaning to me is the fact that all of the participants had an option between using their thumb, pinkie, or index finger to create their bumblebee. This created bees of many shapes and sizes, and this element stuck to me as it perfectly encapsulates how each of these people I support, just like their bees, come in all different forms to create one beautiful piece.



How did the clients react when you asked them to participate in such an important milestone for you?

Peyton: The clients were super excited about participating! Through building a relationship with each of my clients, the majority have known that I was working towards a degree, and they would even ask me questions about it. To have the individuals I have been working closely with throughout this timeline was a full-circle moment.

How has your education in Special Education shaped the way you interact with and support the people we serve at WACOSA?

Peyton: I have been able to draw many connections to my experiences at WACOSA and the special education classroom. Many of the experiences I have had in my classroom, I have been able to recall a point where a similar situation occurred, and what approaches I took, and evaluated the effectiveness of the response given in each setting. Conversely, the experiences I have had in my special education classroom have shaped the way I interact with each person by innovating new ways to modify and adapt certain types of material for each of their physical, emotional, and cognitive levels and needs.

What initially led you to WACOSA? What is the most rewarding, or perhaps the most challenging, aspect of your job here?

Peyton: Initially, before I heard about WACOSA, I had never thought about working with adults in a work setting, but I wanted to get hands-on experience working with individuals with disabilities and broaden my horizons. It has opened me up to many perspectives and topics relating to special

education/disability services, and I have been able to create a basis for a wider understanding of disability from a lifespan perspective in relation to services received. The most rewarding part of my job is seeing each of the individuals I serve grow in their own ways.

What is the single most important lesson or perspective you've learned from working alongside people WACOSA serves?

Peyton: Relationships and time! Everything takes time, including relationships. Part of building that rapport with anyone is also being vulnerable at times. Sharing successes and points of trials helps build a rapport as the people you serve are going to respect you more when you are real, honest, and relatable with them.

What message would you like to share with other young people considering a career in special education or disability support services?

Peyton: Try different things and broaden your horizons! Each of us has different niches, and in the world of special education/disability support services, there's an abundance of not only need but also opportunity in so many areas. Finding your niche comes with trial and error, but it's up to you to explore it.

Peyton's journey reminds us that at WACOSA, the impact of our work travels in both directions. While she provides essential support to her clients every day, they, in turn, have provided her with a lifelong perspective on the power of patience and human connection. As she moves forward with her degree, Peyton continues to embody the "change she wishes to see," proving that when we invest in others, we all grow together.



A SUCCESS STORY IN DIRECT HIRING: WACOSA AND AQUA TRACTION

Aqua Traction, a manufacturer of custom polyethylene flooring for the marine industry, is known for producing skid-proof, easy-to-clean, and fully customizable flooring solutions. Just as important as the quality of their products is the strength of their team—and that team includes employees hired directly through WACOSA.

Aqua Traction currently employs two WACOSA clients. One of them is Jordan, who has been with the company for 3.5 years and has become an integral part of their 15-person operation.

Jordan's success began with a collaborative approach. Jordan and his WACOSA job coach, Chad, worked closely with Aqua Traction to create a trial position that allowed everyone to ensure a strong fit. During the training period, Chad partnered with both Jordan and the employer, helping coordinate expectations, provide on-the-job support, and set the stage for long-term success.

It quickly became clear that Jordan was more than ready. He picked up assigned tasks with ease, and was cross-trained across the organization—running equipment, handling quality control, and taking on a wide range of responsibilities. In fact, Jordan played a key role in developing a quality control system during the final quality and pack-out stage, a process still used today.

"Working with WACOSA and their job coaches has been incredibly valuable," said Travis, supervisor at Aqua Traction. "Chad helped us think differently about training and support, and that partnership made all the difference. Jordan's contributions speak for themselves."

Chad credits Jordan's work ethic and adaptability. "Jordan takes pride in what he does and is always willing to learn something new," Chad shared. "He's earned the respect of the entire team, and it's been great to watch his confidence and skills grow."

Now a key member of the Aqua Traction team, Jordan says he finds his work fulfilling. He jokes that Chad keeps him entertained on the job, but also acknowledges that Chad's ongoing support has been an important part of his success.

"Jordan takes pride in what he does and is always willing to learn something new," Chad shared. "He's earned the respect of the entire team, and it's been great to watch his confidence and skills grow."

– Chad, WACOSA

Outside of work, Jordan enjoys drawing Manga and building with Legos—creative outlets that mirror the focus and attention to detail he brings to the workplace.

Jordan's story is a powerful example of how direct hiring through WACOSA, combined with strong job coaching and employer partnership, creates meaningful employment and lasting success for both businesses and people with disabilities.



This Spring and Summer will bring exciting changes to our Sundial Drive locations. Beginning in June, the City of Waite Park will start much-needed road improvements

on Sundial Drive, along with construction of the new Metro Bus transit station. While these projects will create some temporary traffic disruptions through August, they will also bring lasting improvements to our neighborhood, including safer and more accessible sidewalks on both sides of the street.

Because of the construction, WACOSA will unfortunately not be able to host our annual picnic this year, but we look forward to bringing the fun back next summer!

Throughout construction, ThriftWorks and DocuShred will remain open and operating on their normal schedules. We encourage everyone to continue shopping and donating to ThriftWorks, as your support plays an important role in the success of our training programs.

Our 310, 320, and Annex Waite Park locations will also be receiving updated entrance security enhancements to help ensure a safe and welcoming environment for everyone. We will share additional details once those projects are complete.

We are also proud to partner once again with Paramount Center for the Arts for the third year of Empowered Stars. Please join us on Thursday, June 25 at 11:00 a.m. at the Paramount Center for the Arts in St. Cloud for our original production, Cheese: A Granite City Alien Sing-along. The event is free and open to everyone, so bring your family, friends, and neighbors for a great time!

Thank you for your continued support through all these changes and improvements. We appreciate you and remain committed every day to serving the people and communities we support.

Happy Summer!

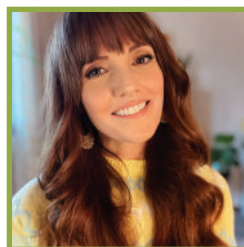
YOUR BEST GIFT MIGHT NOT BE CASH

Tax bills are no fun. Did you know: stock, real estate, and even retirement accounts can often be given directly to us in ways that are friendlier to your wallet than writing us a check? In fact, some non-cash gifts can lower your tax liability while preserving your actual cash on hand for your other needs. If you've ever thought about doing more for the people we serve, there may be a smarter path than you realized. Your financial advisor can help you figure out what makes sense for your situation.

And if you're thinking even further down the road, please consider WACOSA in your will, trust, retirement plan, or life insurance policy. Doing so is one of the most powerful ways to say that

you believe in WACOSA's mission, not just today, but for every person we'll ever serve. Donors who make this kind of commitment are welcomed into our WACOSA Legacy Society, a community of remarkable people securing tomorrow's possibilities today.

Either way, I'd love to talk.



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 Development Manager
 WACOSA

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.

WACOSA IS AN EEO/AA EMPLOYER

WACOSA is an Equal Opportunity Employer. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability, or status as a protected veteran.



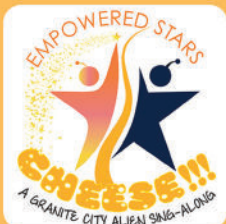
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**JUNE
25**

The Empowered
Stars Present:
***Cheese!!! A
Granite City Alien
Sing-Along***

- Curtain time 11am
- No ticket needed - FREE and open to the public
- Paramount Center for the Arts, St. Cloud



PARAMOUNT
CENTER FOR THE ARTS

CITY OF
ST. CLOUD
MINNESOTA



STEARNS
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Community
Foundation



WACOSA

SAVE THE DATE

**AUGUST
7** **WACOSA
Night at
the Rox**

- 7pm - 9pm
- Joe Faber Field, St. Cloud
- Tickets available at WACOSA Waite Park - Office Entrance or scan QR code.



**OCTOBER
3**

**2026
WACOSA Bash**



- 3pm - 6pm
- Moose Lodge, Waite Park
- Ticket & T-shirts coming soon!
- Italian Meal
- Silent Auction & Raffle
- Live Music
- Proceeds support WACOSA!

Interested in sponsoring the Bash?
Visit wacosa.org/sponsorship or
contact Meghan Hines at
mhines@wacosa.org
to learn more!

