



**Revitalized and Expanded Thrift Shoppe
propels AveVentures Employment
Training Program**

*Participants Kelly Doheny, Nora Prindiville and
Laura Kazmerick sort through donations in the
new 1000 square foot Thrift Shoppe addition.*

Read full story on page 2

Thrift Shoppe propels AveVentures Employment Training Program

A major facelift, 1000 additional square feet, individualized training opportunities for clients, and an energetic new manager have created an exciting and revitalized Thrift Shoppe.

Funds to purchase the adjacent store next to the existing Thrift Shoppe (located at 7710 W. Touhy in Chicago) were provided thanks to an anonymous donor to the *Campaign for Independence*. The three month project was completed in January, 2014 largely due to the renovation work done by Avenues' staff.

The Thrift Shoppe was established in 1977 by a group of volunteers solely to provide funding for Avenues programs, but today it has an additional purpose.

"I see the Thrift Shoppe as an employment training program similar to our Work Center in Wheeling, but instead of packaging and light assembly work, clients sell merchandise," according to Executive Director Bob Okazaki. "More space has been long overdue, and instead of working in an area the size of a broom closet, we can now provide opportunities for more clients."

One of those new opportunities is the addition of three computer stations, a smaller model of the successful Computer Center at the Work Center. Existing staff will help train the clients on using email, document creation, web browsing and other instruction to augment job skills and enrich their daily lives. A goal is to learn how to sell merchandise on eBay.

Laurel Eness, a participant who makes and sells floral arrangements within the client "boutique" at the Thrift Shoppe, is anxious to go online to get design ideas since it will help her earn more money. Laurel is just



The Thrift Shoppe sports a remodeled and expanded area, thanks to an anonymous donor to the Campaign for Independence.

*"I see the Thrift Shoppe as an employment training program similar to our Work Center in Wheeling, but instead of packaging and light assembly work, clients sell merchandise."
-Executive Director Bob Okazaki.*



Manager Willie Sterba and participant Laura Kazmerick prepare the Thrift Shoppe's Easter display.

one of several "entrepreneurial" clients who makes craft items and sells them at the Thrift Shoppe. In addition to keeping the proceeds from the sale of their craft items, they are learning valuable customer service and retail skills.

Currently, seven clients participate in the Thrift Shoppe program, and Bob believes there are opportunities to add up to five more clients in the future.

"We want to determine what is the best direction for each client so their skills can grow and they are kept invigorated," according to Thrift Store Manager Willie Sterba, whose strong background includes retail, academia (a masters degree in education) and fundraising. Willie's other challenge is to "do the best we can for the customers, and complete a store design that is fun, uplifting and functional for them to find their treasures."

In addition to the seven clients "who inspire me every day," Willie is quick to thank his support staff and volunteers. "Everyone is golden – such a great team. I feel like I joined a family; a very supportive family."

Please visit the Thrift Shoppe family at 7710 W. Touhy in Chicago from Monday – Saturday 10 to 5, and Friday from 10 to 7. For information, call 773-631-6230. Women's clothing and jewelry donations especially welcome. For a complete list of accepted donations, please visit avenuestoindependence.org



Robert Okazaki,
Executive Director

A Tale of Two Extremes: A case of neglect vs. Avenues' community of support

Bunkhouse" telling of the abuse and neglect of 32 individuals with disabilities who had been living and working at a place called Henry's Turkey Service, in Atalissa, Iowa.

Based on an original expose by the *Des Moines Register*, what followed was a retelling of 34 years of abuse,

neglect, financial exploitation and other horrors forced upon a group of men from Texas and elsewhere who had intellectual and developmental disabilities. These individuals were modern day indentured servants, living and working in the same place, receiving below minimum wages that had to be paid back to their overseers for substandard housing and care.

The men had limited contact with families and outsiders; most had no choices in what to eat or who they lived with and what they could do in their spare time. They were living in an early 20th century world where their rights were non-existent and being ignored was better than being mistreated.

Despite years of complaints from concerned co-workers and families, multiple government jurisdictions did nothing to remedy this situation. Not until the Spring of 2009, in the week following the *Register's* story, did the state close Henrys and begin the process of transitioning the residents into a 21st century model of support.

Two things are evident from this story; one, real journalism still matters. Absent any investigative light, the public might still be in the dark, not knowing of the plight of these men or others who would fall into harm's way. Stories such as this must continue to be told. If not, exploiters will have free reign with no fear of oversight from those who would fail to protect vulnerable populations.

On March 9, 2014, *The New York Times* published a front page, in-depth article titled "Boys in the

Unlike the men at Henrys, the people at Avenues have access to family and friends, and participate in local community social, recreational and work opportunities.

Second, this story did not need to happen. During the 1950's and 60's, Avenues to Independence and other charitable organizations were established to provide educational services to thousands of baby boomer children with disabilities who were denied basic educational services in the public schools.

By 1975, children with special needs were guaranteed an education; it was during this decade that Texas, Iowa, Illinois and the 47 other states began to close institutions and establish today's system of

community disability supports. At Avenues, we established the first of many residential programs, helping to provide opportunities for people with disabilities to live, learn and work in the most independent settings possible.

Unlike the men at Henrys, the people at Avenues have access to family and friends, and participate in local community social, recreational and work opportunities. An open invitation exists for you and others to visit our programs so that you can see first-hand, how your support is directly benefiting those in need. Through our Board, staff, families, donors, volunteers and others, we have many lights shining on our organization so that everyone can see the proud, productive and independent people that are being supported by Avenues every day.

It is this community of support that Avenues relies upon to ensure the best quality services and agency oversight. However, as Illinois and the rest of the country move toward managed care to fund disability services, there is great concern that government will abandon our model of community charitable support. They view programs for our people as a commodity to be serviced by low cost, for-profit vendors. Profit will trump quality and community oversight will be replaced by "corporate compliance". As the big corporations dim the lights of community involvement, the ensuing darkness could hide another "Boys in the Bunkhouse".

For more than 60 years, Avenues has placed the needs of our individuals with disabilities first. Regardless of the state's move toward managed care, our services will always rely upon the care and generosity of you and the community. Our organization is in the midst of a strategic planning process, working to ensure that the next 60 years of Avenues, will be as successful, if not better, than the first 60. Your participation will be crucial in this success.

For more information on the *Des Moines Register* series and *The New York Times* articles, please visit the links below.

<http://www.desmoinesregister.com/section/ATALISSA>

http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/03/09/us/the-boys-in-the-bunkhouse.html?_r=1

Foundations Support our Programs

Avenues is thankful for the generous grants and corporate gifts received since our last publication.

For General Program Support:

- **Katzenberger Foundation, Inc.**
- **Modestus Bauer Foundation**
- **The Rose F. and Alice M. Koffend Foundation**
- **Whole Foods Market (Park Ridge)**

For the Job Placement Program:

- **Daniel F. and Ada L. Rice Foundation**

For the Computer Training Program:

- **George M. Eisenberg Foundation for Charities**
- **Million Dollar Round Table Foundation**

For Accessible Restroom at Work Center:

- **Laughing Acres Family Foundation, Inc.**

Love Affair Puts a Little Love in Everyone's Heart Mardi Gras Masquerade Unmasks Major Munificence

On February 15, 300 friends and guests of Avenues proved you don't have to be in New Orleans to "Let the Good Times Roll." The 26th annual Love Affair had a festive Mardi Gras theme, but no disguise could hide the fact that supporting Avenues was a priority to everyone in attendance.

A New Orleans style Hurricane cocktail and Dixieland piano music welcomed the guests as they entered the Stephens Ballroom in Rosemont. Sampling hors d'oeuvres and the extremely popular martini bars, guests bid on hundreds of silent auction items, including sports tickets, jewelry, Waterford crystal, travel opportunities and artwork.

Avenues' very own Ron Reeves, the emcee for the evening, challenged everyone to participate in a live auction, "where we really don't auction anything, but auction off an opportunity." The opportunity was the urgent need to update the men's and women's bathrooms at the Work Center in Wheeling, which serve more than 140 people. More than 100 paddles were raised to earn \$62,500 for this very important renovation. This is the largest amount ever raised at any of our live auctions, and together with the proceeds from our generous sponsors, silent auction items, and the sales of raffle tickets, Avenues earned an unprecedented \$140,000.

We extend a very special thank you to major benefactor Clarence Herbst, and congratulate Love Affair Chair Kathy Korsch and her impressive 20 member committee for making "the Good Times Roll!"

More pictures from the Love Affair can be viewed in the Media Gallery at avenuestoindependence.org



a. Devil in Disguise! Avenues Residential Director Floyd Kortenhof gets blessed by St. Patrick, none other than Secretary of Avenues' Board Bob Healy.

b. Enjoying the festivities are (from left) Suburban Partnership Board Member Bob Border and his wife Cheryl, along with Michael DeCata and his wife Debra Kullman.

c. Love Affair Chair Kathy Korsch (left) poses with next year's chair, Elke Quade.

d. Celebrating in true Mardi Gras style are (from left) Steve and Sandy Pernick and former Board Chair Jacki Kimel and her husband Shelly.

e. Family reunion! Love Affair Major Benefactor Clarence Herbst (wearing hat) is flanked by his wife Linda and daughter Kathy. They flew in from Colorado, and Clarence's son Casey, pictured with wife Emmi, came from Ohio to attend the Love Affair.

f-g. More than 100 paddles were lifted as emcee Ron Reeves led the live auction, which raised \$62,500 for the bathroom renovations at the Work Center.



Fred Sasser - Recipient of the Jane and Albert Wohlers Visionary Award at the Love Affair



Avenues Foundation Board Chair Fred Sasser receives the Jane and Albert Wohlers Visionary Award from Natalie Malik, Director of the Wohler's Family Foundation.



Celebrating with Fred are members of the Sasser family. From left, Suburban Partnership Board member John Sasser and his wife Leigh; Alison Whittington and her husband Collin Sasser, member of the Chicago Partnership Board; Shad Peterson and his wife Rebecca; and Fred's wife Pam.

When he was nine years old, Fred Sasser moved to Park Ridge with his parents Robert and Doris Sasser. It was the beginning of the family's involvement with Avenues that has spanned five decades and three generations.

"Tonight we honor Fred for his 30 plus years of concern for people with disabilities." Executive Director Bob Okazaki announced at the Love Affair. "The colors of the Mardi Gras have a lot of relevance to what Avenues does – purple stands for justice, and Avenues was started because there was an injustice in the education system; gold represents empowerment, and we are all about empowerment for our clients, and green equates to faith, and Avenues got started on faith alone – not with government funding but by a mailman who had an idea. These three tenants embody why we are up here tonight - to recognize an individual who really is an embodiment of these three things – justice, empowerment, and faith for all of our people."

*"Fred is a thoughtful and generous philanthropist who embodies the spirit of this award; a true visionary who positively impacts the community each and every day."
-Natalie Malik, Wohlers Family Foundation.*

The Jane and Albert Wohlers Visionary Award was presented to Fred by Natalie Malik, Executive Director of the Wohlers Family Foundation. "This award was created to recognize those who truly understand and support the idea that everyone deserves to be

a productive member of the community. Fred is a thoughtful and generous philanthropist who embodies the spirit of this award; a true visionary who positively impacts the community each and every day."

Fred humbly accepted the award but encouraged everyone to take a pro-active stance for Avenues. "I am

honored to be involved with an organization like Avenues...my recommendation for Avenues is, 'let's be bold, let's be outrageous.'"

We thank our Love Affair Benefactors

- Clarence "Joe" Herbst – Major Benefactor
- Al & Lorie Bartel
- Charles Blachut Family
- James Blue
- Bill & Bernice Bruton
- Matt & Ed Coyne, Coyne Insurance
- Tom & Barbara Emerick
- FCL Graphics – Stephen Flood
- Tom & Cathy Joyce
- Dale Kendrick
- Jacki & Shelly Kimel
- Lawson Products, Inc.
- Patricia Maroney & Joe Kogut
- Bonnie & Ed Reinhart
- Collin Sasser & Alison Whittington
- Oscar's Watch and Jewlery
- Jolene & Steve Silverman
- Anne Stewart, IMM, Inc.
- Whole Foods Market, Park Ridge
- Friends of Avenues

“Together We Did It” - Three Year Campaign for Independence fulfills Promise



“Together We Did It!” From left, Campaign Honorary Chair Clarence Herbst celebrates with Board Chair Peg O’Herron, Campaign Chair Jerry Feldman, and Executive Director Bob Okazaki.

In the wake of Avenue’s 60th anniversary celebrations throughout 2013, perhaps none had more significance than the Campaign for Independence celebration held on January 16, 2014.

That evening represented the culmination of a three year initiative to help finance the future of Avenues and allow people with disabilities to live, learn and work in the most dignified and

independent means possible. The goal was \$3.8 million, and supporters of Avenues not only met this ambitious challenge, but – an incredible result of over \$5 million was committed. According to

Goal: \$3.8 million
Result: \$5.1 million

campaign chair Jerry Feldman, “It was the largest fundraising effort Avenues has ever undertaken, and we were in the middle of the worst economic period in our lives. But we had no question that our mission resonated with our stakeholders, and that the good work Avenues does in enhancing the lives of so many people is valued by all of us and our community.”

Seventy five guests who made a commitment to the campaign were present at the Café la Cave in Des Plaines to celebrate this tremendous achievement, and we gratefully acknowledge the contributions of all the donors - nearly 150 families and individuals- who pledged to the campaign.

The campaign results have already significantly impacted the lives of our clients, and the following is just a sampling of the major accomplishments achieved:

- Acquired a new home for six residents
- Retired residential mortgages
- Expanded the Thrift Shoppe (see story on page 2).
- Provided program and staff enhancements including computer centers and new technology.
- Provided capital improvements to the Work Center, residences, and the Jane and Albert Wohlers Center.

Special thanks for the outstanding support and contributions by the Campaign for Independence leadership committee; Jerry Feldman, Chair; Clarence “Joe” Herbst, Honorary Chair;

and members Al Bartel, Silvia Campone, Edward Dernulc, Bob Healy, Peg O’Herron, Graham Hills, Jacki Kimel, Michael MaRous, Fred Sasser, and Bob Washlow.

More information on the Campaign for Independence, including a more complete list of the accomplishments to date, will be featured in the 2014 Annual Report.

Park Ridge Whole Foods and Rotarians support Avenues



Participants Brett Farrell and Cindy Wroblewski (seated) along with Job Placement Program Manager Calvin Keyes promote Avenues at the new Whole Foods Market in Park Ridge. On February 11, Whole Foods donated 5% of their sales to Avenues, which was more than \$2800.



Enjoying the quarterly bingo and pizza party sponsored by the Park Ridge Rotarians are participants Lori Guthrie and Sharon Duggan. They are assisted by Steve Hunst, BI Manager from Rotary International, (left) and Ed Coyne, Rotarian and Suburban Partnership Board member.

Avenues/Gorman Golf and Tennis Pros prepare for another Classic!

Join Avenues on Monday, July 21 at the Park Ridge Country Club for another swingin’ time playing golf or tennis. If you prefer to relax, just kick back and enjoy cocktails, dinner and bid on our silent auction items. Watch for your invite in the mail, or register on-line at avenuestoindependence.org later this spring.



Suburban Partnership Board Member Sue Feldman drives friend Erin McQuire to their start off tee.

17th Annual Irish Fest brings Luck O' the Irish to Avenues

A record 350 people, including nearly 70 of Avenues' clients, celebrated all that is good about the Irish at The Cotillion on March 9. The "lucky" clients, decked out in green derbies and beads, all received prizes while the other attendees tried their luck at the Pot of Gold Raffle and the Shamrock Silent Auction.

Besides providing a wonderful time for Avenues family and friends, nearly \$35,000 was raised to support Avenues programs.

The music and dance of Ireland was showcased with performances by Tom Joyce on tin whistle, Marysue Redmann on harp, Barbara Holland on flute, plus the Irish Heritage singers and the Weber School of Irish Dancers.

A highlight for this year was Irish Fest's own Grafton Street, named after the upscale shopping street in Dublin. Our Grafton Street featured crafts made by Avenues clients: greeting cards, coasters and paintings, ornaments, decorative pillows, and floral arrangements. Grafton Street was a sell-out, so plans are already

underway to increase the merchandise assortment for next year. The proceeds from Grafton Street, which exceeded over \$500, will directly benefit the art and craft programs.

Bob Healy, co-founder of Irish Fest, believes, "This year was the best in terms of providing a great time for our clients and incorporating their works of art in our Grafton Street market. We heard over and over again how much the guests enjoyed the entertainment, food, and the opportunity to help Avenues. Instead of our thanking them for coming, they thanked us for inviting them!"

A special Irish Thank you (Go raibh maith agaibh) to major benefactor Frank Calabrese, and Irish Fest co-chairs Bob Healy and Peg O'Herron, Mike and Mary Prindiville, Patricia Grimes, and Peter and Jeanne Doheny.

[View more pictures in the Media Gallery at avenuestoindependence.org](http://avenuestoindependence.org)



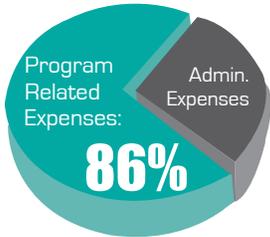
- a.** Retired Avenue's Board member Sheila Schultz places a bid at the shamrock silent auction.
- b.** Jeffrey Jones proudly displays the Pot O' Gold painting he created. The sale of the paintings and coaster sets raised nearly \$300 to directly support the client art program.
- c.** Avenues supporter and Irish Heritage singer John Mahal poses with Diane Flynn.
- d.** Decked in their finest green, participants Stephanie Kegermann and Brian Ray have a good time being Irish!
- e.** Tom Joyce entertains the more than 350 Irish Fest guests on his tin whistle.

- f.** Irish Fest Co-Chair Peg O'Herron (right) poses with her cousin, Jane Fitzpatrick Cavanagh and Jane's daughter Becky.
- g.** Much of the success at our fundraising events is due to the hard work by our volunteers. Staff members Kara Allcox and Janice Valentine take a break from their volunteer duties.
- h.** Participant and seamstress Lenore Sierzega shows off the pillows she made that sold at the Grafton Market, the client boutique, as friend Jay Corr looks on.

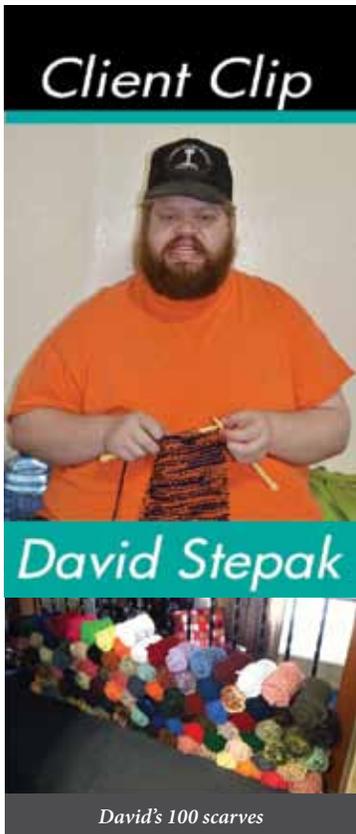


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We are proud that more than 86% of all donations directly fund our vital programs.



A “yarn” about Giving – David Stepak makes every stitch count!

Although his job at the Work Center means a great deal to him, especially operating the blister pack machine to heat seal I-PASS units, David has another strong passion. He loves to knit. It’s a passion that began more than eight years ago when he was 19, and a passion that was for the most part self-taught. “It’s a calling, his mother Susan explained, “and he’s very proud of what he does and he understands it’s important to give things.” As a result, David donates the scarves he knits.

Last year David challenged himself to knit 100 scarves (see adjacent picture) for the children at Green Bay Elementary School in North Chicago. It was important, according to David, “that they’re not cold this winter.” David has made another commitment to knit 100 more scarves for next year, and is already working towards that goal – a goal that will take 200 days to fulfill since it takes an average of two days knit a scarf – but David is stitching on time!

Calendar of Events

| | |
|------|----------------|
| 4/13 | Family Meeting |
| 6/20 | Annual Dinner |
| 7/21 | Golf Outing |

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| Executive Director | Robert Okazaki |
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Avenues to Independence is dedicated to putting aside old ideas about what is possible.

We work in partnership with the community to support and encourage people with disabilities to lead the lives they choose. Our success will eventually be measured by how little we are needed.

Avenues to Independence is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization providing services for adults with intellectual, physical, and developmental disabilities. All services and employment are provided on an equal opportunity basis. Avenues is accredited by CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities).



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