

Avenues

To Independence

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Park Ridge IL, 60068
www.avenuestoindependence.org

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*On behalf of everyone
at Avenues to Independence,
we wish you a
happy holiday season!*

Celebrate with Avenues in 2015!



Over the Rainbow

Love Affair

Bring your valentine and have a heart for Avenues!

Saturday, February 14, 2015

New location!

Loew's Chicago O'Hare Hotel
Rosemont
6 pm to Midnight

Watch for your invites soon or visit avenuestoindependence.org



18th Annual IRISH FEST

Avenues invites you to a grand Irish celebration!

Sunday
March 8, 2015
2 pm

Cotillion Banquets
Palatine

AveNews Winter 2014/2015

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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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Working for Independence

*Here comes the bus!
Bus aide Tim Kelly is ready to help
special needs students get to school.*

Read full story on page 2



Working for Independence

At 4:15 in the morning most folks are still sleeping, but that's when the day begins for Tim Kelly and four of his Avenues co-workers - Brendan Foley, Brett Farrell, Kym Dohnke and Amanda Krischke. Five days a week, they are picked up at 6 am by Septran Student Transportation to begin their days as school bus aides for children with special needs, and they don't return home until 5:30 in the evening.



Workers (from left) Brett Farrell, Kym Dohnke and Tim Kelly arrive home from their shift at Septran

It's a long day, but when asked about their job, all enthusiastically say they "love it." According to Bill McLaughlin, Septran Operations Manager, "They are role models for the younger kids. They are good-natured, always willing to help, and take pride in their jobs. When they came in for their employment interviews, everyone had stories about when they took buses to school, so they really relate to and value the work they do."

Septran Recruiter Willis Singleton echoes the praises of Avenues' workers, "They love to learn something new, and are so willing to learn our process." The "process" consisted

of a two day class in which our workers learned the proper techniques of helping students with wheelchairs get on and off the bus, and how to assist the bus drivers.

Driver Frank Wollinski, who works with Tim every day, says his work ethic "is exceptional, and he has a lot of patience for the students under his care." The workers not only feel good about the work they do, they enjoy earning a good wage, as Tim boasts, "I'm getting rich!"

Networking provides new job opportunities

Septran is just one of several local employers who recently hired Avenues' workers. Long-time Board Members Matt and Ed Coyne, of Coyne and Co. in Park Ridge, recently added three participants to their payroll; one worker does clerical work and two workers clean the office. According to Matt, "Almost right away I knew we had made the right business decision. They come to work with such enthusiasm every day and have taught me and my colleagues to appreciate work in a whole new way."

Matt Coyne adds, "It is the rare business that



Armed with his supplies, Charlie Giera gets ready to clean the office of SS&G.

can't benefit from hiring an Avenues' client. In every office, there's some task a person with developmental disabilities can do." Thanks to the Coyne's recommendation, the team now cleans the adjacent dental office of Dr. John Davis, an Avenues' volunteer; and the Des Plaines office of SS&G, headed by Suburban Partnership Board Member Dirk Ahlbeck. Dirk's wife Tracy, another Avenues' volunteer states that, "The clients do a great job of keeping our offices clean; they are hard-working and conscientious and really contribute to a positive and pleasant work atmosphere here at SS&G."

Good workers available!

Avenues currently has more than 60 people in the Job Placement Program. While more than 40 of them are employed in the community, Employment Specialists Randall Smith and Calvin Keyes are seeking employment for the other workers. The workers are available for food service, grocery, packaging, retail, custodial, housekeeping, and office and clerical positions to name a few.



According to his manager, Trader Joe's employee Stuart Duncan "brings a lot of life to the store."

To find out how you can hire an Avenues worker, please call our Employment Specialists and Job Trainers Calvin Keyes and Randall Smith at 847-292-0870, or visit avenuestoindependence.org

Avenues thanks the following businesses for hiring our workers!

- Barnaby's Pizza – Des Plaines
- Coyne and Co. Insurance – Park Ridge
- Culver's – Mt. Prospect
- Fed Ex – Wheeling
- House Red – Forest Park
- Jewel – Park Ridge, Niles, Glenview, Des Plaines
- John Davis, DDS – Park Ridge
- McDonalds – Rolling Meadows
- Michael's – Niles
- Niles Fitness Center – Niles
- NIMFA – Park Ridge
- Septran – Northbrook
- SS&G – Des Plaines
- St. Paul of the Cross Church – Park Ridge
- Trader Joe's – Park Ridge



Robert Okazaki,
Executive Director

Future of disability services in Illinois at stake

Thank heaven the elections of 2014 are finally over. No more character assassinations, promises of chickens and other goodies in everyone's pot and dubious pledges to cut taxes. Not sure how government can provide more while paying with less, but apparently, some politicians are not good with math.

Whether you celebrated or lamented the changes, there is no doubt that disability services must remain a priority in Illinois. While any change at the top brings questions for those of us lower down the food chain, advocates are already at work in the quest to ensure that disability services will be high up on Governor-Elect Bruce Rauner's agenda.

While the party in charge will be different, party affiliation is not correlated to good or bad times for disability services. Under Republican Governor Richard Ogilvie, the first grants to expand community disability programs took place. His model sparked a national trend for state-funded disability services and Illinois was a leader in the disability movement of the 1960's and early 1970s.

Rauner needs to learn from this history to make Illinois a 21st century model for progressive, community disability services.

Under Democrat Dan Walker, Avenues and other community agencies expanded services, creating the foundation for the residential, day and employment programs that we have today. Unfortunately, good times don't last forever and by the time Jim Thompson was elected governor in 1977, we had experienced oil shortages, higher unemployment and the beginning of a real decline in real dollar funding for disability programs.

Illinois government began to downsize and by 1982, Avenues closed its Park Ridge and Wheeling work centers, consolidating services to a new location in Des Plaines. Through donor and fundraising support, the Wheeling center was resurrected the following year. This is notable in that it was the first of many capital and operational moves made possible by the largesse of our donors

While Governor Jim Edgar and Illinois benefited from the 1990's economy, Illinois disability services did not. By 2001, a state dollar only covered .85 cents in services. During George Ryan's tenure a "Do the Right Thing" campaign attempted to reverse this decline. While initially successful, funding cuts during his final years accelerated the decline.

The cycle continued with Blagojevich.

Up in the beginning, down by the end. By the time Patrick Quinn became Governor, community service funding was ranked 42nd nationally while our outdated institutional costs were among the highest in the nation. State funding dropped to 75% of costs; all of this just as we were entering the biggest downturn since the Great Depression.

Quinn understood the need for Illinois to update its systems. If not for the Great Recession, his modernization actions and other leadership on disability issues could have rivaled that of Richard Ogilvie. Unfortunately, it was not to be.

Today, thousands of individuals with disabilities are looking for new leadership. Funding improvements and rebalancing of the system using the more efficient and effective community-based services must be accelerated.

Illinois has had some high points in its history of disability services. Rauner needs to learn from this history to make Illinois a 21st century model for progressive, community disability services.

We will all work together with our new Governor to ensure that individuals with autism, cerebral palsy, Down Syndrome and other intellectual, physical and developmental disabilities will be an important priority. Their future is at stake.

(To read Bob's full editorial, please visit the news and issues section at avenuestoindependence.org)

In memoriam... Albert Wohlers

Caring friend of Avenues allowed people with disabilities to fulfill their dreams

Avenues lost a great friend with the recent passing of Albert Wohlers. For many decades, Albert and Jane Wohlers shared Avenues' vision to put aside old ideas about what is possible, and they understood the power of those ideas.

In 2005, they bestowed a gift that enabled Avenues to secure the Jane and Albert Wohlers Center, Avenues' main office at 515 Busse Highway in Park Ridge. The gift ensured that Avenues will enrich the community for generations to come.

In 2012, Albert received the first Jane and Albert Wohlers Visionary Award, in recognition of their generous support, and the care and concern they gave to the people of Avenues.

The award continues to be presented annually at Avenues' Love Affair, to recognize an individual, family, business or organization that shares the Wohlers' vision, and positively impacts the Avenues to Independence community.



Executive Director Bob Okazaki expressed that, "The people of Avenues are grateful to Albert and his family for the far range of programs he has helped provide. Not only has the Wohlers' philanthropy helped individuals with disabilities, but has literally put Avenues to Independence on the map."

10th Annual *Spotlight on Wine* uncorks new earnings and attendance records!

Like the fine wines it has presented over the years, the *Spotlight on Wine* has improved with age in the past decade! This year marked the 10th anniversary of the *Spotlight on Wine*, which is sponsored by Avenues' Chicago Partnership Board.

This year's event, held on October 2 at the National Hellenic Museum in Chicago, raised nearly \$46,000 and was attended by 250 guests and volunteers. Ten years ago, the first *Spotlight on Wine* raised \$3,000 and was attended by 90 guests.

Since the modest debut of that first *Spotlight on Wine* in 2005, an impressive \$200,000 has been cumulatively raised

to support Avenues' programs. Over the years, proceeds have benefitted many initiatives including, the purchase of vans to transport our participants; assistance with the down payment of a home for our residents, and support for the computer center within the Work Center. This year's proceeds will enhance and expand the computer training and education program to Avenues' residents and workers, including support for the Thrift Shoppe's AveVenture Employment Training Program.

Chicago Partnership Board member Eldon Ham served as Master of Ceremonies, while live auctioneer Michael Bruni of Laurus

Strategies generated enthusiastic bidding for several prizes, including sports tickets, celebrity golfing, and a luxury dinner and hotel stay in Chicago.

While sampling six exceptional wines from Atlas Imports, and a wide variety of delicious hors d'oeuvres from Hel's Kitchen Catering, several lucky guests won raffle prizes, and bid in a special silent auction featuring seven paintings by Avenues' artists.

Few things get better with age, but the 10th annual *Spotlight on Wine* proved to be an exceptional vintage!



a. Chicago Partnership Board Chair Jolene Wise Silverman (right) celebrates with fellow member Lauren Lavorato (from left) and guests Micheli Nathan, Krysten Kelly, and Leah Trinkala



b. Governing Board Vice-Chair Jerry Feldman (center) won the silent auction bids on these special paintings proudly created by Avenues' artists Brian Ray and Denise Hacke.



c. Kudos to Board Member Jill Liska (center) who initiated the idea for the first *Spotlight on Wine* in 2005. She is pictured with (from left) Mita Patel, Dennis DeMoss, and Arvind Patel.



d. Pat and Nikki Peterson's wine glasses won't be empty for long once they open the case of wine they won as a raffle prize.



e. Partnership Board Member Amy Bergren samples some tempting hors d'oeuvres from Hel's Kitchen Catering.



f. Toasting the tenth *Spotlight on Wine* with wine by Atlas Imports is Suburban Partnership Board member Kathy Korsch (left) with friends and volunteers.



g. Steppin' out for the *Spotlight* is Benefit Committee member Katina Panagopoulos

We thank our *Spotlight on Wine* sponsors:

Premier Cru Level

Anna C. Gamble Foundation
Laurus Strategies
Collin Sasser & Alison Whittington
Wintrust

Reserve Level

Chapman and Cutler
Dreamworks Graphics Communications/
Ron Bjelopetrovich
Fidelity National Title Company/
Peter Petersen

Robert & Lynn Goldschmidt
MB Financial
Silverman Consulting
Weiss-Ham Foundation/Eldon Ham &
Nan Weiss-Ham

Old Vine Level

Allcox family
Diana Almazan
Paul & Rebecca Carlisle
Dennis DeMoss
Jerry & Sue Feldman

John & Carol McKinnon
Steve Silverman & Jolene Wise Silverman
Brian & Sheri Stewart
Wells Fargo Advisors/Michael Palet

Vin de Table Level

Amy Bergren
Steven & Michelle Cucchiari
Cary J. Hall/Cary J. Hall & Associates
Peter & Helen Kelly
Lauren Lavorato & Joseph Barron
Ed & Bonnie Reinhart

“The choices we make”

Avenues provides inspirational messages at the Park Ridge Women’s Interfaith Prayer Breakfast



Guest speakers (from left) Kathy Seiwert, Cindy Wroblewski and Peg O’Herron (2nd from right) are pictured with Judy Wolf Matijevic (center) and Betty Henneman.

Two Avenues’ ambassadors, Chair of the Board Peg O’Herron and longtime volunteer Kathy Seiwert, were guest speakers at the Park Ridge Women’s Interfaith Prayer Breakfast on October 18.

More than 150 attendees at the Park Ridge Country Club listened as Peg and Kathy reflected on “The Choices We Make” and how

“choosing” Avenues has impacted their lives. According to Peg, “At Avenues, I know that I am doing something worthwhile; for myself, for my husband and step-son, and for other clients and their families. I feel extremely fortunate that my life’s twists and turns brought me to Avenues.”

Kathy, with a little help from Avenues participant and friend Cindy Wroblewski, shared how volunteerism has changed her life. “Volunteering gives me so much more back than the effort it requires... an easy choice for sure!”

Support Avenues as you shop for the holidays!



Visit Avenues Thrift Shoppe at 7710 W. Touhy in Chicago for great gift ideas and bargains in clothing, toys and games, glassware, household items, books and DVDs.

Check out the client boutique featuring handmade gifts including floral arrangements, ornaments, painted glassware, note cards, hand sewn purses and other unique items.

Open Monday through Saturday from 10-5, and from 10-7 on Friday. (Please note the Thrift Shoppe will be closed from Dec. 24 – Jan. 1. Call 773-631-6230 for more information.)

Avenues Smiles when you shop online at Amazon Smile!

Amazon will donate 0.5% of the price of your eligible AmazonSmile purchases to Avenues to Independence every time you shop at

smile.amazon.com. Visit <http://smile.amazon.com/> and select Avenues to Independence as your charitable organization and start shopping!



Third annual Beyond the Runway Tea and Fashion Show - a “Model” of success!”

On Sunday October 26, more than 230 guests supported Avenues Thrift Shoppe by attending the third annual Beyond the Runway Tea and Fashion Show. Guests bid on auction items, won raffle prizes, and purchased unique items in the popular “boutique,” a section featuring gifts and handmade objects designed by the Thrift Shoppe participants. Greeting cards, ornaments, purses, painted glassware, floral arrangements, decorative pillows and other sewn objects were just a few of the items for sale that were produced by Avenues’ creative crafters and entrepreneurs.

Following the afternoon tea and light lunch, guests were treated to the fashion show featuring very special models – the participants and volunteers of the Thrift Shoppe – who all wore outfits donated to the Thrift Shoppe. According to Beyond the Runway Chair Pat Grimes, “The confidence and ‘swagger’ shown by the models this year was by-far the most touching and memorable part of the fashion show. You could see that each of them loved every moment on the runway!”

Thanks to the generosity of our sponsors, donors, volunteers and guests, record proceeds of more than \$17,000 was raised. The total earnings will benefit the Thrift Shoppe’s AveVenture Employment Training Program, which helps Avenues’ participants develop valuable retail and customer service skills, and helps prepare them for community employment.

We thank the “Beyond the Runway” sponsors:

Presenting Sponsor
Glenview State Bank

Darjeeling Tea Level
James P. Banks

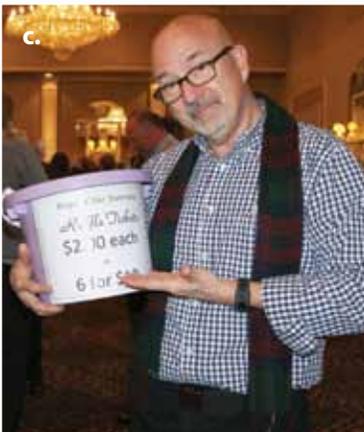
Jasmine Tea Level
Dennis Greco, Top Shelf Amusements, LLC

English Breakfast Tea Level

JoAnn Casali Marchetti
Linda Feldten
Claudette Giza
Steven Godek – GPM Mfg, Inc.
Linda & Thomas Kuhn
Chris & Joe Riscossa
Jean Smith
Jolene Wise-Silverman



a. Volunteer Amanda Krischke models a chiffon gown donated to the Thrift Shoppe.
b. Thrift Shoppe volunteer and committee member Rosanne Plescia (right) poses with Sue McGuire.
c. Thrift Shoppe Manager Willie Sterba sells raffle tickets.
d. Former Chair of the Board Jacki Kimel proudly displays the items she purchased in the “boutique.”
e. As volunteer Shonda Okazaki supervises, model and participant Nora Prindiville applies make-up before her appearance on the runway.



A community partnership for 61 years

First United Methodist Church of Park Ridge hosts "Avenues to Independence Celebration Day"

On Sunday September 21, the First United Methodist Church of Park Ridge welcomed guests from Avenues to Independence to an "Avenues to Independence Celebration Day" in recognition of their 61 year partnership. In 1953, Avenues to Independence (known then as the Park Ridge Aid for Retarded Children) had its humble

beginnings in the basement of the church, where classes were held for children with developmental disabilities since there was no place for them in the public school system.

In honor of this very important relationship spanning more than half a century, more than 50 Avenues participants and their families enjoyed a celebration service followed by a meet-and-greet reception, cookout, luncheon and bingo games.



Rev. Rich Darr (right) and Rev. Bob Campbell warmly welcomes Avenues participants Lori Guthrie (left) and Sharon Duggan.



Enjoying coffee and camaraderie after the service are Avenues participants (from left) Mary Feight, Kathy Drommerhausen, Connie Koshaba and Ellen Moore.

This was the second year of the celebration, and according to parishioner and Avenues Board of Directors member Al Bartel, "This is a great fellowship and a great collaboration, and I hope the event will become an annual tradition." Welcoming team member and Avenues volunteer Lisa Shewfelt added, "It's so nice to reaffirm our commitment to each other after 61 years." Special thanks to the more than 12 church volunteers who made the day so special for Avenues!

Please Make Avenues a Part of Your Holiday Giving

This holiday season, please remember the people of Avenues to Independence. Your donation today means training and jobs tomorrow for as many as 200 Avenues workers. Employment builds confidence, builds independence, and changes lives.

The people of Avenues want to be contributing members of our community, and they have so much to offer. Your donation today will help put people to work, and all of our lives will be richer for that.

If you haven't sent your gift from our recent holiday appeal, you can still make a difference by sending your gift by check or credit card in the enclosed envelope, or donate online at www.avenuestoindependence.org



Jeffrey Jones is a proud employee of Culver's.

Generous Foundation Support

Avenues is thankful for the grants we received since our last publication:

- Henriette Lange Burk fund – for employment options
- Edmond and Alice Opler Foundation – Job Placement Program
- Butler Family Foundation – Job Placement Program

Client Clip



Cindy Wroblewski – "Way Cool"

Super outgoing, full of energy, and a positive attitude are just a few words that describe Cindy Wroblewski. Even when Dominick's closed its doors and she lost her job of 20 years, Cindy didn't let it get her down. In fact, she has a new job she calls "way cool." Cindy was recently hired at NIMFA (Advance MyoTherapy & Pain, Inc.) in Park Ridge four days a week to clean and prepare the therapy rooms between client sessions. According to her job coach Calvin Keyes, her enthusiasm and work performance is very good. That energy and passion

extends to Cindy's other activities – whether playing basketball with her Avenues "Wildcat" teammates, dancing and exercising to Zumba and Cheerobix, playing games on her tablet, participating in Avenues' "Tuesday Night Friends" gatherings, or fulfilling her duties as an altar server at her family parish. Cindy even prepares gluten free meals at the Sasser Family House apartment she shares with Nora Prindiville and Mary Grace Powell. Cindy is definitely a "way cool" member of the Avenues family.