

the Independent

A Publication of Freedom Resource Center for Independent Living, Inc.

October 2013

The Art of Freedom

On October 17th artists, families, and friends gathered for Freedom Resource Center's "Art of Freedom" event at the Dakota Medical Foundation. The event was a time for local artists with disabilities to show how creating art helps them become free and more independent. This was the first year of the show and 33 artists displayed over 100 pieces of art.

"We were looking for a fun way to introduce ourselves to the community, tell them what we do and what services we provide, and encourage participation from people with disabilities." Nate Aalgaard, Freedom Resource Center's Executive Director stated. "Members of our Board of Directors came up with the idea to host an art show made up entirely of artists with disabilities. We wanted participants to illustrate how art can express their freedom." Nate concluded.

Art of all shapes, sizes, and materials were on display. Watercolor paintings, poems, pencil drawings, needle point, clay sculpture, and glass mosaic art are just a few examples of what was on display that evening. Attendees were given cards and encouraged to vote for their favorite art piece of the evening. The voting drew a lot of attention.



1st Place - Brian Olson

After the votes were tallied winners were announced. Winning first place was Brian Olson for his detailed pencil drawing of photographs. David Gangl came in at a very close second for his breathtaking mosaic glass sculpture.



2nd Place - David Gangl



3rd Place - David Dickson

David Dickson took third for his vibrant colored drawings. Congratulations to all three from Freedom Resource Center.

"Seeing the camaraderie and excitement of the artists really stood out to me. Even though it was a competition, everyone was encouraging each other and complimenting their art." Tyler Axness, Communication and Policy Coordinator said of the evening.

"The Art of Freedom was a huge success in my opinion. The pride and confidence of the participants was contagious for everyone who attended." Angie Bosch, Office Manager said of the event. "I can't wait to host this event again next year."

The excitement from participants and attendees was clear, this will not be the only time Freedom Resource Center hosts the "Art of Freedom" event. "I really hope you put this event on again next year." Mark Peer an art participant at the event said as he talked with Freedom Resource Center staff.

Freedom Resource Center would like to thank all participating artists, the Dakota Medical Foundation for letting us utilize their beautiful new building, and partners in our community for attending and making this a successful event. We look forward to hosting this event again for many more years.

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INSIDE

“Because We Are EQUAL to the Task”

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, a yearly campaign to bring attention to the employment challenges and successes for people with disabilities. The theme to this year's campaign is “Because we are EQUAL to the task.” According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the origins of this campaign can be traced back to 1945, giving us 68 years to advance solutions and increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Allow me to break down Freedom's view of where we currently find ourselves.

According to Freedom Resource Center's “Needs Assessment Survey”, lack of employment opportunities continues to be one of the leading barriers to independence in our 19 county service area. This naturally leaves us scratching our heads as North Dakota's economy continues to lead the nation with an unemployment rate of just 3%. Such a low rate leaves employers across the

EYI

What: Journaling Workshop
Presenter: Carol Kapaun Ratchenski
When: November 7, 2013
Time: 2:00 to 4:00pm
Where: Freedom Resource Center, Fargo
RSVP by November 1st call 701-478-0459 to let us know you would like to attend

What: Pie and Ice cream and Tree Decorating
When: November 26, 2013
Time: 10:00 to 11:00 am
Where: Conference Room #3 Lincoln Center
Registration is appreciated so we have enough for everyone!!
218-998-1799

What: Making Caramel Apples
When: November 14th, 2013
Time: 1:30 to 3:00 pm
Where: Freedom Resource Center, 315 N 11th Street Suite G, Wahpeton
Materials will be provided: registration is appreciated so we have enough for everyone!!
701-672-1648

state actively searching to fill open positions. East of the Red River in Minnesota we see a strong recovering economy with a 5.1% unemployment rate meaning today there are more job opportunities since the worst recession in modern times.

To summarize we see businesses actively seeking workers and people who want to work not finding employment. This scenario leaves us wondering where is the disconnect? The answer is not simple, not universally agreed upon, and will not be solved overnight. There are multiple barriers including accessibility, public stigma, misunderstanding of accommodations, lack of personal responsibility, and governmental loopholes.

Sometimes it is stigma towards people with disabilities that has created mounting barriers for competitive employment with livable wages. The thought of people with disabilities being unable to perform key job tasks due to the disability has prevented some employers from hiring. Other times there is a complete misconception of what having a disability means. It is important we begin to define people for who they are as an individual and not on their disability to overcome such stigma.

Physical and communication accessibility prevents potential employees from seeking certain employers. If an individual is physically unable to enter a building or maneuver within their workspace they will not be able to adequately perform their desired tasks. On the other hand if someone has a disability that impacts their vision it may be difficult to utilize certain technologies. Both of these generic examples can be overcome with reasonable accommodations.

Misunderstanding of what are reasonable accommodations from both the employer and potential employee have made prolonged employment difficult for some people. In some cases simple accommodations can help with productivity and alleviate stress that causes miscommunication leading to unnecessary termination. Reasonable accommodations

are usually determined on an individual basis. For a better understanding of how to achieve a reasonable accommodation we encourage you to contact our office at 800-450-0459.

Some people with disabilities are still learning the social norms and responsibilities to become a high quality employee. Social norms are learned in school and in social settings. Unfortunately, too often people with disabilities have been segregated in school and are unable to attend social gatherings due to other environmental and community barriers. Continuity in education and growing with peers of all abilities is very beneficial in our personal development and relationship building.

There is a governmental loophole in which people with disabilities are allowed to work for subminimum wage which limits self-sufficiency. Under the Fair Labor Standards Act, subminimum wage employment is accepted for the following groups, “student-learners (vocational education students), as well as full-time students employed by retail or service establishments, agriculture, or institutions of higher education.

“Also included are individuals whose earning or productive capacity is impaired by a physical or mental disability, including those related to age or injury, for the work to be performed.”

It is stated to be designed to prevent loss of employment opportunities for these individuals. Unfortunately, too often we see this model of employment as the first and only option being exercised for people with disabilities. This is why Freedom has supported “employment first” which seeks to find competitive wage jobs in integrated settings for people with disabilities.

We all must be actively engaged in breaking down these barriers so that “Because We Are EQUAL To The Task” does not just become another feel good slogan but reality. People with disabilities are an untapped resource in the employment market globally. Employment at a livable wage creates opportunities for independence and at Freedom that is our bottom line.

Deer Hunting, and a Whole Lot More

At age 54 I went hunting for the first time. I had been encouraged by at least a couple of people to try the Twist of Fate hunt. It took quite a few years of prodding for me to finally go ahead and do it. For those unfamiliar, Twist of Fate is a nonprofit organization formed in 1999 that exists to provide an annual deer hunting experience for people with disabilities. The hunting camp is located on the farm of Gordon and Audrey Solhjem near Leonard, North Dakota. Many area landowners agreed to allow hunters and their guides to hunt on their property during the three-day event, which was held September 26-29.

Hundreds of hours of preparation go into the yearly hunt. My two guides worked to put out a ground blind and prepared the site for me to hunt. They took time out of one of their Saturdays to go out there with me to make sure it would work the next week when it was time to go live with the hunt. Volunteers built a cookhouse on the property this past spring; and spent the previous weekend setting up all the tents, generators, and other amenities to make this event as efficient and comfortable as possible for all 12 of us who had the chance to hunt.

I did not know who any of the hunters would be prior to arriving at the camp on Thursday. To my surprise, I knew a few of them. There was Tom, who was previously a board member at Freedom; Bob, who worked for Protection and Advocacy in Fargo; Mike, who I met at a wheelchair pool tournament several years ago; and Greg, who works for Roll-A-Ramp. Then there's Steve, who happens to be my second cousin. I had not seen him in probably 25 years. I also met several new guys. That, and getting to know many of the volunteers, was a lot of fun.

As far as the hunt, it went exceptionally well. I think everybody was pretty much shocked when I came back to camp honking my horn, as tradition dictates, less than an hour and a half after I got out to my hunting blind. Yes, I realize that I was pretty lucky to get a deer in only 45 minutes. I was kidding about how easy it was. However, after seeing three guys go out day and night from Thursday until Saturday and not get their deer until the last possible opportunity, I felt fortunate. I think they enjoyed the experience too, although they spent a whole lot more time sitting quietly in their blind than I did in mine.

Now I have the fever. I can't wait

until I can find a date on my schedule to go out to my family's farm and set up a spot to go hunting. But it isn't about shooting something. That's never been a big desire for me, and probably the main reason I never went hunting before. It's about the camaraderie. It's about having something else to do with my friends and family.

Having a physical disability, there are definitely barriers for recreation. Twist of Fate helped me understand how to eliminate some of those barriers. It has opened up a new door for me, and for that I am truly grateful. I pledged that my contribution for the coming year will be to recruit hunters for next year and beyond.



Nate Aalgaard with his first deer after his hunt with the Twist of Fate

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National Disability Employment Awareness Month

Because We Are EQUAL to the Task

Held each October, National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) is a national campaign that raises awareness about disability employment issues and celebrates the many and varied contributions of America’s workers with disabilities. The theme for 2013 is “Because We Are EQUAL to the Task.”

NDEAM’s roots go back to 1945, when Congress enacted a law declaring the first week in October each year “National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week.” In 1962, the word “physically” was removed to acknowledge the employment needs and contributions of individuals with all types of disabilities. In 1988, Congress expanded the week to a month and changed the name to “National Disability Employment Awareness Month.” Upon its establishment in 2001, ODEP assumed responsibility for NDEAM and has worked to expand its reach and scope ever since.

Source: *United States Department of Labor*

What’s Wrong With This Picture?



The photo almost doesn’t need a caption to explain what is wrong with this photo. Without an elevator, people who use a wheelchair will not be able to use the accessible bathroom downstairs.