

RISE REPORTER

MARCH 2020 | VOL. 44, NO. 1



Mike Steffen is a valued employee at the Lift Bridge Brewery in Stillwater. Rise will host our Tapping Into Possibilities "Friend-Raiser" at this great venue on Tuesday, May 12, from 3-10 p.m., with raffle drawings at 6:30 p.m. Select from a wide array of their fine-tasting beers made from seasonal ingredients. The Lift Bridge Brewery is located at 1900 Tower Drive West in Stillwater. Hope to see YOU there!

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A LETTER FROM PRESIDENT LYNN NOREN

AS WE BEGIN 2020, we are focused on the Minnesota legislative session once again! Unlike most businesses in Minnesota, companies like Rise who are funded with public dollars must advocate for legislative changes for funding increases. We have established great relationships with our legislators and encourage them to partner with us in advocating for the programs and services that support the people we serve at Rise.

One of our biggest challenge today as a service provider is to hire and retain high-quality staff team members. The challenge exists because our funding is directly related to the wages we have available to pay, yet the current funding and associated pay rates have not kept pace with pay for other job types in our community.

As we have in the past, Rise supports the legislative goals of the Minnesota Best Life Alliance, a nonpartisan coalition of Minnesota service providers, caregivers, self-advocates, family members, and community partners advocating for Home & Community-Based Services which support people with disabilities and older adults.

Their 2020 legislative proposals present options for legislators to continue making direct support professional positions more attractive to current and prospective caregivers to help fix the workforce challenge surrounding disability services high turnover and low retention rates. Throughout this legislative session, we will share information with you about how you can connect with your legislator to support the Best Life Alliance proposals.

Another legislative proposal we will be working on this year is to secure funding for the days that we had to close in 2019 related to weather-related challenges. Rise had two days of closure during the 2019 "Polar Vortex" which was not as bad as for some other providers in different parts of Minnesota. Each day that we close operations at Rise, we are unable to bill for more than \$80,000 in services provided. Establishing a grant pool of funding for providers to apply for to help offset the lost income for days closed would be a big help to all of us.

Working in partnership with state agencies, advocates, families, provider associations and others, Rise will be advocating for increased funds for disability services. You can follow Rise on Facebook or email us at lklemstein@rise.org to receive information about these critical legislative priorities.



WHO WE ARE

Rise unlocks potential and opens doors to success for people with disabilities or other challenges through creative solutions and customized support. We envision a progressive, supportive, and collaborative environment that fosters meaningful growth and provides opportunities to live a life filled with purpose.

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AT RISE

Tom Kettelson
Chair, Rise Board of Directors

Lynn Noren
President

Noel McCormick
Vice President of Advancement

Beth DePoint
Director of Public Relations; Editor

✧ JOIN US ✧
for

A NIGHT AMONGST THE STARS

9TH ANNUAL CELEBRATE RISE
✧ FUNDRAISING GALA ✧

SAVE THE DATE

MONDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2020
5:00 TO 8:30 PM

MINNEAPOLIS MARRIOTT NORTHWEST
BROOKLYN PARK, MN

TICKETS

SALES BEGIN AUGUST 1

Watch for registration information on our
website: www.rise.org

QUESTIONS?

For questions about the gala and/or sponsorship,
please contact **Samantha Marks** at Rise
763.792.2450 // smarks@rise.org

Truc Pham, Rise's director of welfare-to-work programs, left a legacy of assisting others integrate into American culture, become contributing members of the community

RISE AND THE Twin Cities community lost an honorable colleague and friend with the passing of Truc Ba Pham who died January 15 at the age of 65.

Since 1996, Truc was the director of Rise's welfare-to-work programs which served primarily refugees and immigrants resettling in the Twin Cities area.

Truc spent most of his adult life working to improve the lives of minority members from many different races, cultures, and ethnic backgrounds, most of whom had disabilities, low education, language barriers, and limited work histories in the United States.

"I admired Truc for taking all the challenges, heartaches, and difficulties of his younger life to work for others," said Rise President Lynn Noren. "He knew firsthand what immigrants and refugees had lived through and the challenges they faced coming to America and integrating into a new culture. The work he did at Rise for the past almost 25 years was extraordinary and will leave a mark on people for

"The programs designed and operating under Truc's direction were a couple of decades ahead of their time."



generations to come."

Born in North Vietnam, Truc's family was among the more than one million people who fled to South Vietnam to avoid persecution for being Catholic. They settled in Taung Chanh, a small town near Saigon.

Truc's father worked at an international military installation which had an American school for the workers' children. At the age of 10, Truc implored his father to attend this school so he could learn English and get a good education which he felt would be his ticket to a better life.

His father consented and Truc took a 30-mile bus ride alone each school day and thrived in this challenging learning environment as

he was a quick and smart learner. Even at a young age, Truc decided that his long-term career goal was to get a job with the Vietnamese State Department.

Following his graduation from high school in 1971, Truc went on to college and studied English and law enforcement at Saigon University. He worked as a chief of police in Saigon, and for a time, with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA).

After the fall of Saigon in 1975, Truc endured several years of imprisonment before escaping and then risking his life as one of the "boat people" who set out to sea three separate times on overcrowded boats in search of freedom and a better life. (Twice they were captured and returned to a "re-education" camp.)

Truc was finally rescued by the French government when an impending storm threatened the lives of everyone crammed together in a small wooden boat.

Arriving in the United States as a refugee with little else but the shirt on his back, Truc eventually settled in Minnesota and began to rebuild his life. He attended a local university to reestablish his educational credentials and build marketable skills to start a new career.

Truc first worked for a Twin Cities community rehabilitation center providing counseling and

Truc was a doer. He understood great things could be achieved when teaming and sharing resources with many like-minded people and agencies.

technical support to people receiving welfare assistance. This position eventually led him to interview for a job at Rise.

A new interagency project was getting off the ground to better serve the employment needs of the growing number of refugees and immigrants with disabilities from Southeast Asia who were resettling in Minnesota. Truc had the personality and professional experience required to lead this project.

“Truc was not only successful in managing Rise’s Pathways project, but he became the leading force behind Rise’s development of multiple programs and services to support the job placement needs of job seekers from diverse minority backgrounds and their families,” said former Rise vice president, Don Lavin, who first hired Truc.

“The programs designed and operating under Truc’s direction were a couple of decades ahead of their time,” Don added. “All of these programs were staffed by a skilled multicultural and multilingual team of professionals.

“The end result was immediate and measurable. Rise’s welfare-to-work program became among the top performing programs in Hennepin County.

“Further, two of Truc’s outstanding interagency programs received national recognition for excellence as an ‘emerging, promising practice.’ During his time at Rise, approximately 2,000 people obtained competitive employment, workforce inclusion, and greater economic prosperity.”

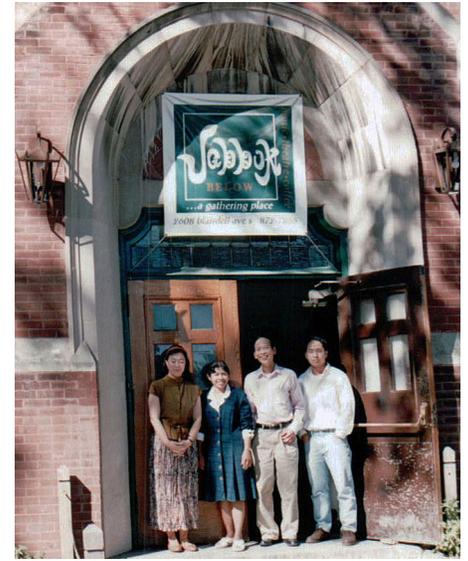
Despite his years of mistreatment and imprisonment in Vietnam, Truc realized that harboring hate would only corrode and destroy his very core. Instead, he looked forward with a hopeful spirit and optimism.

The work Truc did at Rise for nearly 25 years was extraordinary and will leave a mark on people for generations to come.

Truc was a doer. He understood great things could be achieved when teaming and sharing resources with many like-minded people and agencies. He worked hard until his failing health in the last year limited his capacities to do the job.

Truc was a proud father and husband who loved his family very much. He is survived by his wife Hoa, and three sons Tony, Tyler, and Don, ages 16-20. An active member of St. Adalbert Church in St. Paul, Truc enjoyed spending time with his fellow Vietnamese parishioners and friends, celebrating their cultural heritage.

“We will work hard to carry on



In 1996, Truc (second from right) built a team of professionals from several different countries, many of whom were refugees themselves. The first Rise Pathways office was located in a South Minneapolis church. It has since relocated to 3708 Nicollet Avenue South.

Truc’s groundbreaking work and the legacy he has built,” said Tim Dickie, Rise’s chief program officer. “While we will all miss him very much, Truc left us with the tools and the services we will need to continue to move forward.”

A memorial reception will be held in May to honor Truc. More information will be coming soon. We hope you will join Rise team members and Truc’s family as we celebrate his life and legacy.

Commissioners declare 'Joel Loer Day' in Washington County; co-workers celebrate with a festive reception

JOEL LOER HAD QUITE a week in early February!

When Mary Divine, a reporter from the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, discovered that his co-workers at the Washington County Government Center in Stillwater were hosting a reception to celebrate Joel's 30th anniversary there, she paid him a visit at work.

Joel's story about the work he does for the county's Community Services Department and the appreciation his co-workers have for him made the front page of the

Sunday *Pioneer Press* on February 2. Joel collates and assembles county departments' information packets for use by residents.

His story was also picked up by the Associated Press and posted on the online *U.S. News & World Report*.

More than 100 people -- co-workers, friends and family, retired county workers, and others -- came out to celebrate Joel on February 4. That made the newscast on KMSF-Fox 9 that evening!

His co-workers lined up to say

great things about him; Joel's mom Joan Loer expressed her pride in him, and the Washington County Board of Commissioners officially proclaimed it "*Joel Loer Day*." "The WHOLE day," Joel pointed out to the crowd with a big grin.

People spoke of his dedication, attention to detail, and reliability. In addition to the great work Joel does for the county, his co-workers enjoy his tremendous sense of humor and appreciate the way he brightens their day with his positive attitude and enthusiasm.



Top left: *Joel seems to get a kick out of the nice things his mother Joan is saying about him when interviewed by KMSF-TV News. Top right: Joel keeps right on working as Associated Press Photographer Jean Pieri shoots dozens of photos of him on the job. At right: Commissioner Gary Kriesel reads a proclamation (with a whole long list of 'Whereas'es!') issued by the Washington County Board of Commissioners, declaring February 4, 2020, as 'Joel Loer Day'!*



Victor's job is 'just the breath of fresh air' he needed

By Samantha Marks,
Rise Development Manager

HAVING GROWN UP in rural Wisconsin and experiencing homelessness and food insecurity as a child, Victor Morrison vowed that he would never put himself in that position as an adult. He knew he had to create his own security, and to Victor that meant having a good job with a steady income.

Searching for a fresh start in Minnesota, Victor earned a college degree and worked in the manufacturing industry throughout the 1980s. He was promoted several times as he built his career. He was proud to be able to pay his bills, and keep a roof over his head and food on the table. This was the ultimate victory for Victor! He was living the American Dream.

Until...disaster struck. During the recession of the early 1990s, Victor was laid off. Feeling panicked, he took any job he could find to keep the steady stream of income he had become so accustomed to. He experienced another lay off, then another.

Victor felt as if he had lost his purpose in life; his lifelong goals were slipping through his fingers.

With each job layoff, Victor's anxiety escalated. He didn't know if he should blame himself or the state of the economy for his unemployment.

Eventually, all Victor could think about when he began a new job was "if" or "when" it would end. His sensitivity to noise, coupled with his crippling anxiety,



made working difficult. He just didn't feel as lively, creative, or light-hearted as he used to be.

Victor was in his 50s when he was first diagnosed with autism. As relieved as he was to finally have this diagnosis because it answered so many questions he had been grappling with, Victor also feared how it might affect his job search. He started working with Rise Employment Consultant Angel Doring in March 2017.

As they got to know each better, Angel realized she knew of a "really unique job opportunity" just right for Victor.

"It was just the breath of fresh air I needed," Victor said.

Victor was hired at Peaceful People Imports' small warehouse in Fridley, where he locates, pulls, packs, and ships out exotic, one-of-a-kind fabrics imported from countries across the globe. It's a physically demanding job as he is

lifting up to 40-pound boxes, but he handles it.

"I love the feel of the products and their wonderful, bright colors and patterns -- you can't be unhappy on this job!"

Victor's boss, Steve, took the time to adapt any obstacles or inconveniences Victor came across on the job so he could be as comfortable and successful as possible. Steve also openly supported Victor when he announced his gender transition and gave him adequate time off during his medical process.

When it comes to combating Victor's lingering feelings of insecurity, that's where Angel steps in.

"Whenever he's stressed out, we take the time to identify what Victor is exactly feeling and put it into words," Angel explained. "It is a collaborative process, and it's important to take the time to identify what is really going on in a person's life."

To Victor, Angel is a good sounding board and trusted voice of reason.

"She helps me verbalizes my fears and cope with them. If it weren't for Angel and Rise, I wouldn't be able to tolerate my insecurities, anxieties, and fears."

Victor is active in the progressive faith community, considers himself an amateur musician, and is an avid bicyclist.

To this day, Victor still takes pride maintaining his home and being able to put food on the table.

Andy enjoys working independently and part of a team at Design Ready Controls

By LeeAnna White,

Advancement Intern

WALKING THROUGH the brightly lit, expansive Design Ready Controls (DRC) in Brooklyn Park, one is immediately impressed with the quiet efficiency of the expansive production facility. In the middle of all the action sits Andy Brown at his neat and orderly workstation, hard at work with a big smile on his face.

“I like to keep an organized workstation because it helps me work more efficiently,” he said proudly. “I keep spare pieces close by because you never know when a piece may be missing and then I have it right here. This work is easy because everything is like a puzzle piece and I love puzzles.”

DRC provides engineering and manufacturing services to customers around the world in a wide range of industries, including HVAC, construction, water treatment and pumping, oil and gas, solar power, agriculture, alternative energy, and semiconductors.

DRC co-workers stop to greet Andy and check on his day as they walk by. He says his coworkers are friendly and helpful and everyone works together as a

Andy keeps an organized work station which helps him be more productive.

team.

Andy, who is 37, graduated Park Center High School in 2002; he is proud to have earned all A’s, one B and one C in his school career, and skipped the 9th grade.

After high school Andy worked a few short-term positions and then found a job as a production worker at Liberty Carton in Brooklyn Park which better matched his interests and skills. He was an integral member of a Rise work team there for 16 years.

Andy eventually decided that he was ready to take on more challenges and wanted to work more independently. When Program Manager Keith Hovland learned of a good job at DRC, he was confident Andy was just the right person for it.

Andy started as a part-time assembler in May 2019. Before his departure from Liberty, Andy’s coworkers threw him a farewell party to show their appreciation for him

as well as their excitement for his future endeavors.

Andy exudes confidence and is extremely knowledgeable about his work. “I do fine working by myself. As soon as I get here, I go straight to work. I love the new projects and challenges. Once I have all the information, I can go quick. And of course, I love the big paycheck.”

Andy has made friends here and his coworkers appreciate his hard work and efficiency.

“Andy is a dedicated, wonderful employee who shows up each day and does an outstanding job,” said Plant Manager Mark Oaks.

“Andy is fun to have working with us. He comes in with a smile on his face and leaves with a smile his face.”

Rise Program Supervisor [then employment consultant] Matt Hansen checked in every Wednesday with Andy and his supervisors to address any work-related issues he may have. “Andy passes all his safety trainings with flying colors and his supervisors often rave about him,” said Matt.

When Andy isn’t working, he is remodeling his townhome with the help of his dad who lives nearby. Andy has enjoyed playing hockey with a Special Olympics team, The Thunder, since 2003, and alternates between the wing and center positions. He was excited to play in the state tournament at the end of February.

Andy hopes that his success at DRC will inspire others to know that they can also be successful.





Great job as a retail helper at Kwik Trip helps increase Steve's self-confidence, gives him a sense of purpose

"IT TOOK ME TOO LONG to figure out that college is not for everyone – including me," said Stephen Harding who had enrolled at Winona State University several years ago to study chemical science.

"Once I left school, I bounced around a lot and didn't have much good work experience. My therapist suggested I go to Bridgeview and check out Rise's job placement program."

At the Bridgeview Drop-In Center located in the Lee Carlson Center for Mental Health and Well-Being in Fridley, Steve connected with Rise's Employment Consultant Ben Streitz. Through Rise's Individual Placement Services (IPS) program, Ben assisted Steve with career planning and job development.

Marci Jasper, a business consultant with Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS), knew of great work opportunities at Kwik Trip as she had assisted many others with getting jobs there. Steve and his support team agreed that would be a really good place to start back to work.

"Turns out, working part-time at Kwik Trip and making a slow transition back into work was exactly what I needed," Steve said. "It's a nice place with good pay, great managers, and everyone who works there is friendly. It's fun for me."

Working as a retail helper, Steve says, is fast-paced and keeps him busy. He unloads trucks, stocks soda, ice, and milk, cleans up throughout the store, takes



Steve (right) appreciates meeting with Rise's Employment Consultant Ben Streitz a few times a month to help ensure he continues to do well on the job at Kwik Trip and address any work-related issues.

trash out, and restocks shelves.

Most importantly, his Kwik Trip job has increased Steve's self-confidence.

"I used to think that having a job was out of sight for me," Steve admitted. "But now I have a sense of purpose and can set goals for my future."

"Ben helps keep me going," Steve added. "He knew what could work for me and believed in me that I could get a good job and it would work out well."

"Steve exemplifies how you can succeed when you develop a plan and surround yourself with a

support group," Ben noted. "LaNay Koralesky from VRS was instrumental in helping Steve formulate his employment plan and connecting him with Marci. Then he took it from there, executing the plan with his positive attitude and perseverance. It won't surprise any of us if Kwik Trip offers him other opportunities in the future."

Currently Steve and his two beloved cats live with his younger sister; he bikes or takes the bus to work. Steve is grateful that his job enables him to pay for his own groceries and help out.

Steve has met some great people at Bridgeview and enjoys some of the many social activities and group sessions offered there. He especially likes playing board games and Dungeons & Dragons.

Former Board member Elaine Voss lived life with passion, energy--and left a legacy at Rise

RISE LOST A DEAR friend and supporter when former Board member Elaine Voss passed away December 21 at 83. She served on Rise's Board for nearly 20 years, including a term as president.

During her years with Rise in the 1980s and '90s, Elaine helped lead the agency through some challenging times of growth in both services and locations.

People appreciated Elaine for her keen intelligence, kind heart, and the enthusiasm which she poured into everything she did.

Elaine worked as Deputy Secretary of State under Joan Growe and was an advocate and activist, who worked hard to increase voter turnout statewide.

She had advanced degrees in

nursing and education, and along with her husband Gordon, was active in Anoka County and Minnesota state politics. In addition to Rise, Elaine served on more than a dozen organizational boards.

"Elaine was a true mentor and friend to me as a growing professional at Rise," said President Lynn Noren. "She believed in the power of advocacy and taught me so much about the importance of public policy work."

"Elaine was remarkable for the energy and passion she poured into everything she did, whether it was for work or family," said her daughter-in-law, Kathleen Voss, who now works as a lead vocational evaluator for Rise.

"But Elaine also knew how to



have fun and enjoy life. She was just such a well-rounded individual. When I saw the open position at Rise, it piqued my interest because I knew of how much she enjoyed her years on their Board. And now that she's gone, it's really special to me that I work at a place where she left such a legacy."

Elaine is survived by her son Gregory, daughter Kirsten, and their families.

Your gift to Rise is an investment in people! Generous supporters contribute to Rise's in many ways ~

Please consider some of the different ways you can support Rise:

- * **Smile.Amazon.com:** Sign up online to have a percentage of your purchases donated to Rise -- simple, automatic, and no cost
- * **Planned giving** through a bequest, will, trust, life insurance policy, retirement account, or stocks and assets
- * **Workplace giving** through the United Way or employer match
- * **Volunteer**, individually or as a group, in a wide range of activities and projects
- * **Celebrate Rise** sponsorships, donations of raffle and live auction items
- * **Give to the Max Day:** Online giving at GiveMN.org in mid-November each year



For more information about these and other ways to support Rise, please contact Samantha Marks at 763-792-2450; smarks@rise.org.

Volunteer Nicholas McKissack, shown here with Jill Peterson at Rise Crystal, enjoyed assisting people participating in our Art Speaks program. Nicholas is a college student majoring in education.



Larry uses his life experiences to inspire, support others

By LeeAnna White,

Advancement Intern

LARRY MITCHELL IS truly a gentle soul and thoughtful man. He shares his experiences, not only to remind himself of his humble beginnings, but to help educate and be an advocate for others.

Larry, who is 59, has faced significant personal obstacles in life. Over the years, Larry has had a hard time maintaining a job due a previous criminal conviction, as well as some mental health, dental, and medical issues, including seven surgeries. His lack of medical insurance also made tending to his health a huge challenge.

Larry first worked with Rise Program Manager Nancee Magistad (then an employment consultant) who helped him put together a resume of his 35-year work history. She recognized his strong work ethic and was confident he could do well in the right job.

Employment Consultant Hollie Petersen started meeting with Larry in August 2019, while he was working for the Salvation Army as a housekeeper at one of their downtown shelters. Larry enjoyed working around individuals who had similar experiences and backgrounds as he had.

A compassionate man, Larry became an advocate for some of the other men at the shelter and shared with them tips on finding health services. He explained to the men that there are organizations and services out there that can help them like Rise. But he found that becoming involved in



other people's challenges began to take an overwhelming toll on him.

Despite all the obstacles Larry has faced, however, he never gave up. In December 2019, he was offered a great job as a general utility worker with flexible hours working for Aramark, a food service caterer, at US Bank Stadium.

"My supervisor takes me as I am, even with my challenges –I am truly blessed," Larry said. He added that his supervisor commends Larry for being a reliable and devoted employee.

Since his Aramark job is part-time and seasonal, Larry plans to apply for the Minneapolis Downtown Improvement District (DID) as an 'ambassador' in March so that he can work more closely with people. He hopes to "bring more happiness to the streets of downtown Minneapolis."

In this capacity, Larry would walk through the downtown streets offering people assistance by giving them directions, answer-

ing questions, and recommending dining and entertainment spots. It's a position that certainly aligns with his spirit and personality!

Larry hopes that sharing his story will inspire others who may be facing a similar situation, encouraging others to conquer their hardships.

"Those of us who have survived need to recognize our blessings," he said. "I've made some bad choices over the years which I regret and can't erase. I can only move forward now."

Larry added that he wants to help spread information relating to mental health and mental health services as well as employment services like Rise which assist people who have disabilities live productive, happy lives.

"I have had some great people like Hollie and Nancee at Rise who have really understood my pain and frustration and have been there for me. It's so nice to have them as a safety net should I need help. I am so grateful to them.

"For those of us who come from the streets and have our ups and downs in life, it is important not to let our past hinder our future. Don't let failure get in your way -- never stop trying."

In his free time, Larry enjoys fishing Minnesota lakes, bowling, and staying healthy!

Rise honors three outstanding managers with 2019 Excellence in Leadership awards



THIS YEAR'S EXCELLENCE in Leadership awardees were honored at a Rise managers' retreat in December. They were nominated by their fellow co-workers who had to say this, in part, about them:

Kim Sorenson (left), program supervisor for Rise's Adult Day Program - New Brighton

Kim has proven to be a true leader among the Adult Day Program staff. She creates an exciting work environment and collaborates effectively with community partners and support teams.

Setting high expectations for herself and her teammates, Kim highlights her team members' gifts and talents to enhance services.

Kim models excellence in all that she does. She plans meaningful, creative activities and sees to it that people served by Rise are well-integrated into the New Brighton Community Center.

Encouraging her team to go above expectations, Kim continually builds mutually beneficial relationships.

Samantha Trebtoske (middle), program supervisor at Rise Crystal

Samantha has put her considerable energy into driving and embracing many huge program changes and implementing the change from vocational to life enrichment services at Rise Crystal this past year.

She educated team members and set the tone for culture change. She establishes clear goals for team members and worked hard to ensure the team's success.

Samantha is known for and appreciated by her fellow teammates for her offering a free exchange of ideas and taking a positive approach in designing inclusive programming and rewarding their innovation.

Samantha's co-workers find her to be organized, educated, thoughtful and innovative. They especially enjoy her wonderful sense of humor and boundless energy.

Austin Beatty (right), MEC St. Paul program supervisor

Austin demonstrates Rise's

Standards of Excellence on a daily basis. His management style is person-centered, collaborative, and was developed over many years of working in the field. He works effectively with peer agencies, most notably in the DeafBlind community.

Austin trusts and respects his team members and encourages them to develop innovative ideas to improve Rise services.

Austin carefully matches the team member who is best suited for each individual served. He inspires others through his own actions by incorporating new technologies to be more efficient and make services more accessible.

In addition, Austin is a strong leader who has both the technical skills and the human services 'heart.' He is a great mentor and ensures that team members are recognized and feel appreciated for their good work.

Read more about another award Austin received on page 15.

Hearty congratulations to Kim, Samantha, and Austin!



Allison makes big career change to work with kids

YOU MAY RECOGNIZE her smiling face from a few years ago when Allison Dukek was #37 in Rise's *45 Stories for 45 Years* feature. Back in 2016, she was working as a data entry clerk and receptionist at Rise Bloomington, but moving forward with plans for a big career change.

Today she is proudly working as a teacher's aide at the Hypointe Childcare, a licensed daycare provider in downtown Lakeville. It is just the job she was hoping to get.

Although Allison is skilled in a wide range of software programs, she realized her true passion was working with children after volunteering at a church daycare. Being a beloved aunt to her young nieces and nephew also helped her realize that that really was the career path she wanted to pursue.

With assistance from Rise's Employment Consultant Sarah

Gustafson, Allison found "the perfect match." She works primarily with babies ages nine to twelve months, but will help in rooms that have children from one month to six years old, if needed.

"I love taking care of the babies, rocking them to sleep, feeding them, putting them down and getting them up from their naps, comforting them when they need a hug," Allison added. "I want to show them I really care about them and love knowing I have a hand in what they'll be someday.

"It's a relaxed atmosphere with at least three teachers in each room and we are all willing to help each other and do our part. Jen [Orth] and Tricia [DeMarais], the owners, are both moms so they put the needs of the kids and the staff first."

What makes Allison a great teacher's aide? "I think I am a very caring person – and outgoing, smart, and having a positive attitude. I want to give to others. I am very determined to prove to people that I can do great things."

Coming from a loving family who always gave her the support she needed to be successful, Allison says, "I want to be a voice for others who were labeled and told they wouldn't accomplish much. Even my own doctor said I wouldn't be able to han-

dle a job in the community. I want to encourage people to push forward. You can do anything you set your mind to. Don't let anyone destroy your dreams."

"Ally is a great addition to our team," said Tricia. "Her passion for children shines through in her day-to-day tasks and we love watching her engage with the children alongside her co-teachers."

Allison graduated from Lakeville High School in 2004. She earned her teacher's aide certifications by taking three online classes and tests which she will have to renew every two years.

Allison checks in Sarah every afternoon after work via phone; Sarah visits Allison at Hypointe about once a month to help ensure she continues to be successful.

"Allison's strength of purpose defines her," said Sarah. "She is confident in her dreams and she is making them come true."

"If it wasn't for Sarah's inspiration and encouragement, I wouldn't have gotten as far as I have in my career," Allison noted. "I owe everything I have become to her. She has been my rock since I started working at Rise."

Allison lives in a group home in Apple Valley with three other housemates and takes Lyft to work Monday through Friday. The women enjoy hanging out together and Allison especially likes to cook for them dishes that her beloved grandmother taught her. She also enjoys bowling, going to movies, and shopping.



Rise team at
HOM Furniture
recognized for the
great work they
do recycling
packaging
materials at
Coon Rapids
warehouse



RISE AND HOM FURNITURE in Coon Rapids have enjoyed “a partnership that works!” for many years. At a recent annual awards ceremony, Operations Personnel Manager Dan Lentz acknowledged the individual and collective contributions people from Rise have made in HOM’s recycling of furniture packaging materials. Dan noted that in 2019, they recycled 2.1 million pounds of cardboard and 52,000 pounds of Styrofoam! The Rise team is a group of proud, hard-working people, including (back, from left): John Fleagle, Kyle Hansen, and Rise DSP Keith Bredeson. Front row from left: John Kurkoski, Jason Steiner, Jared Schwab, Brian Murray, Mary Freerks, and Andy Japs.

Do you have questions or concerns
about legislative issues, Rise services?

President Lynn Noren will host two information
evenings for family and guardians of the people
we serve in March at two Rise locations.

Lynn will provide important information about
Minnesota legislative bills, provide guidance
about contacting your representatives, and
answer any questions you may have.
Light refreshments will be served. No RSVP
is necessary. We hope to see you there!

Rise Oakdale: Monday, March 16 at 6 p.m.
7800 Third Street North, Suite 800, Oakdale

Rise Coon Rapids: Monday, March 30 at 6 p.m.
1156 - 114th Lane N.W., Coon Rapids

✓ EVERYBODY COUNTS
✓ 10 QUESTIONS
✓ SAFE & SECURE
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STARTING MARCH 12, 2020

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Rise **CENSUS COUNTS 2020** **community Action PARTNERSHIP**
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AMERICA'S POVERTY FIGHTING NETWORK



Deb Struckman proud of good, long career at Rise

By LeeAnna White,
Advancement Intern

AFTER WORKING AT RISE for nearly 40 years, Deb Struckman might now start really thinking about retiring as she approaches her 66th birthday in late December of this year.

Deb came to Rise in 1980 af-



ter finishing her public schooling. With her fun and bubbly personality, Deb has been a great addition to the work team at Rise Spring Lake Park's production facility. She works part time Monday through Friday and especially enjoys working on packaging and assembling subcontracts.

"With Deb's great sense of humor, she's easily liked by her peers and staff here at Rise," said Program Supervisor Bryce Lewis. "Deb takes pride in the work she does to ensure customers are happy with the product they receive."

When she does choose to retire, Deb

knows that she will miss the many friends she has made at Rise over the years.

"When I come to visit them at work, I will have to wear a visitor's badge," she realized. "That will be really different!"

In her free time, Deb enjoys spending time with boyfriend of 32 years, Mark. When the weather is nice, the couple likes to take walks and enjoy a picnic together in the park. They also like going out to eat and seeing movies. "Comedies are our favorite," Deb added.

A resident of Living Well assisted living apartments, Deb has many friends in the building.

In addition to spending time with Mark and his family, Deb also likes to go bowling and often rolls a score of 100 or more!

Austin named MRA's 2019 Job Placement Professional

MEC PROGRAM Supervisor Austin Beatty was named the *2019 Job Placement Professional of the Year* by the Minnesota Rehabilitation Association (MRA) Job Placement Division (JPD) at their annual conference.

In his nomination, it was said that: "Austin is truly an outstanding job placement professional. He demonstrates passion and dedication to the people he serves and his team at MEC.

"Austin rises to the challenge as he supports many working relationships between people and businesses, problem-solves to

meet a variety of the individuals' needs, while at the same time, engaging with businesses.

"He seems to take what comes his way in stride, piecing out what needs to be done, prioritizing cases and organizing others to keep all the balls in the air!

"Austin is active in the placement community, connects well with colleagues, shares his wisdom and strategies, and engages well with businesses in multiple communities.

"Austin is a valued member of MRA and JPD. He is serving as the secretary and making a huge



contribution to the division. Austin has also successfully taken on a role as presenter of the *Placement 101* training where his talents are greatly appreciated."



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Rise can help you find & keep great workers!

As an employer, you know how important it is to gain a competitive edge in the labor market. Rise matches hard-working, dependable individuals with temporary and permanent employment positions in businesses throughout Minnesota and western Wisconsin -- like Mata Sisomnuk, shown here with Starbucks Manager Martin Schaffner. Rise can assist you with recruitment, selection, on-the-job training, follow-up support services, and job customization. For more information, check out our website: rise.org/matching-you-with-job-ready-candidates.

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