

# RISE REPORTER



DECEMBER 2020 | VOL. 44, NO. 4



*Jason Christensen is part of the Rise team working at Activar in Bloomington, named the Minnesota Association of Habilitation & Rehabilitation's 2020 Employer of the Year. See more on page 7.*

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## A LETTER FROM PRESIDENT & CEO LYNN NOREN

Our *Celebrate Rise Gala* was held on October 26, and while the event was very different this year because it was virtual, we were excited as to what a great success it turned out to be! We could not be more appreciative of our sponsors, online attendees, staff team members, and wonderful volunteers who gave of their time and resources for the event. You can read all about the gala in this issue.

You will also find stories about the fabulous people we serve and staff team members who were recognized at the event. Tim Dickie, Rise's chief program officer, and I were fortunate to be able to visit each of the *Rise'ing Stars* and *Champions of the Mission* honorees to present their award in person at their homes or work sites. We enjoyed, too, getting to meet some of their family members, co-workers, and others who all contributed to their success. Tim and I were incredibly moved by the accomplishments of those who were recognized. If you weren't able to tune in to the gala, you can meet them here on pages 4 and 5.

As we continue to move through these challenging times, navigating the complexities of the pandemic and the daily reminders of divisiveness in our country, it is never lost on me that all of us at Rise are fortunate to work together toward a common inspiring mission, even in difficult times. We are so proud to share the stories in this issue with you, with the hope that they will touch your lives with a bit of positivity that we are all needing at this time.

Have a wonderful holiday season! We look forward to the new year in 2021, with hopes that it will be full of more new inspiring stories to share with you.



## 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.

## COVID UPDATES

For current information on Rise's services relative to the COVID-19 pandemic, please go to our website at [rise.org](http://rise.org) and click on the *Updated Changes and Policies* banner on the home page. Stay safe. Be healthy.

## CONTENTS

- 03 Virtual *Celebrate Rise Fundraising Gala* is a great success!
- 04 Honoring this year's *Rise'ing Stars*
- 05 Congratulations to Rise's 2020 *Champions of the Mission*
- 06 John starts new life for his family in Minnesota with help from Rise
- 07 Activar named MOHR's *Outstanding Employer of the Year*
- 08 Need a Lyft to work?!
- 09 Your support of Rise has never been more important
- 10 Meet Rise's *Champions of the Month*
- 12 Michael Sack puts writing skills to work for campaign, new job
- 13 Donatelle finds Rise workers bring positive energy to workplace
- 14 Kristi flourishes at 21 Roots Farm
- 15 Jacob does great work at Medart
- 16 Business partners help make Thanksgiving festive

## AT RISE

**Kathy Klang**  
Chair, Rise Board of Directors

**Lynn Noren**  
President & CEO

**Noel McCormick**  
Vice President of Advancement

**Beth DePoint**  
Director of Public Relations; Editor



# Celebrate Rise Gala goes virtual -- and what a fun night it was!

WHILE WE TRULY MISSED sharing an evening with nearly 600 gala guests this year, we were so heartened by the fabulous response we received to our first-ever virtual, online *Celebrate Rise Fundraising Gala* on October 26.

If you weren't able to tune in, you can still watch a recording of it at: [bidpal.net/celebraterise2020](http://bidpal.net/celebraterise2020).

We are excited to report that with the tremendously generous support of our sponsors (listed to the right), our volunteers, supporters, and donors, Rise raised more than \$96,000 -- close to our year-end goal of \$100,000!

The 28-minute program, produced by AVEX Audiovisual Express, plus a live auction made for a festive gala event -- even though we couldn't all be together.



“Like so many others have had to do these past several months, Rise had to re-imagine how we were going to host our important annual fundraising event,” said Noel McCormick, Rise’s vice president of Advancement. “With some great advice and support, we were able to put together a fun gala which people could watch from the comfort of their own homes. We truly appreciate everyone’s generosity!”

We are already starting to plan for Rise’s 50th anniversary celebrations in 2021 and are hopeful that we will SEE you at the Minneapolis Marriott Northwest on November 4, 2021, for *Celebrate Rise!*

Thank you again to all our generous donors and supporters!



*Auctioneer Andy Imholte and Gala Host Nancy Lyons prerecorded Rise’s virtual event at the AVEX production studios in St. Paul.*

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Sheila Minske & Erin Peterson

## SPECIAL THANKS TO GALA VOLUNTEERS

Annie Heggernes  
Nancy Lyons, Gala Host  
Alex Samek, Video Producer  
Maggie LaMaack, Fast Horse  
Adam Wrucke

## WE REALLY APPRECIATE

AVEX Audiovisual Express  
Jim Blizzard, Hy-Vee  
Kelly Casey-Klinke, Rise  
Patsy Eull  
Steven Eull  
Fast Horse  
Fladeboe Advancement  
Andy Imholte, Auctioneer  
Mary Sutherland, Riffland  
Solutions  
Kayla Wyffels, Hy-Vee

## *We honor these Rise'ing Stars for their perseverance, hard work & commitment to their goals*



### **MEYER BELKIN**

When Meyer Belkin was offered “wrap-around” services through Hennepin County Drug Court’s Diversionary program, he received the support he needed to make significant changes in his life. With the assistance of Rise employment consultants, Meyer began to rebuild his career, first as a sous chef in a downtown Minneapolis restaurant, and now as a manager of three sober houses. He is also studying to renew his cosmetology license and pursue that career path. Meyer has dedicated himself to giving back to a community which he says has given so much to him over the past few years through charitable gifts and volunteering.



### **JOSEPH FRITZ**

Joseph Fritz has faced many difficult times with his mental health over the years, which made building a career challenging. But he kept moving forward, and with support from a Rise employment consultant, found success working in a maintenance position as well as a CNC (computer numerical control) saw operator. Joe is now working in a new job, moving closer to his employment goal as a concrete construction worker. Joe also benefitted from Rise housing supports and was able to move into his own apartment. With more stability in his employment, finances, and housing, Joe’s health has greatly improved. He is excited be saving to purchase his own home.



### **JAMES KOCH**

James Koch has overcome many challenges over the years, but continues to do well and build his career. Originally hired five years ago as a cashier at the Walmart in Woodbury, James’s solid work ethic and continual skill development caught the attention of his managers. They have promoted him to positions of increased responsibility, including customer service manager, and his current position as an optician assistant, which he really enjoys. James’s hard work and determination have led to his great career success.



### **JERIANNE LINDMAN**

Jerianne Lindman didn’t let the COVID-19 pandemic stop her from enjoying and benefitting from the services she receives at Rise’s Adult Day Program in New Brighton. Although not able to attend in person, Jerianne has flourished using remote services and goes to great lengths not to miss her scheduled sessions, even bringing a device with her on the road when her family is traveling. Jerianne enjoys leading group discussions in nature studies, trivia games, American Sign Language lessons, and even dancing her heart out during music class -- clearly demonstrating the value of being together with her peers. Even if they are at home across the miles, Jerianne helps make it fun for everyone.

# Congratulations to Rise's Champions of the Mission for their outstanding contributions to our work



## **SHYLO OLSON**

Shylo Olson, a direct support professional (DSP) at Rise New Richmond, is valued by those with whom she works for always having a positive attitude, a big heart, and wanting to make a real difference in people's lives. Shylo also seems to have a special way with each person and makes them feel comfortable, heard, and valued; she is encouraging and preparing people to be successful in the community. Shylo serves on both the Team Member Recognition and Safety Committees, helping to ensure that the entire New Richmond team feels appreciated for the great work they do everyday.



## **JENNIFER SAWYER**

Jennifer Sawyer is an occupational communication specialist (OCS) with Rise's Day and Employment Sensory Support Unit, working with people who have intellectual disabilities and are blind, Deaf, or DeafBlind. Many of the people whom Jennifer supports have never worked in the community. She is known for her tenacity and continually developing creative ways to assist people lead their best lives. Jennifer is endlessly patient and uses 'teachable moments' to enhance and hone people's work skills. Jennifer is a strong advocate and works effectively with other community organizations to ensure people get the additional support they may need.

*Meet other Rise Champions of the Month on pages 10-11*

## **INTERESTED IN AN EXCITING CAREER AT RISE?**

*Rise is all about people and potential!*

*We want exceptional professionals on our team who will help make a difference in people's lives--like Program Supervisor Kim Devore who works with people in Rise's Day and Employment Services at Rise Anoka. Here she is assisting Jordan Halligan play a game of UNO remotely with another Rise friend who is playing from home.*

*Meet other Rise team members and find out how they spend their work day and what they enjoy most about their career at [rise.org/team-member-spotlights](https://rise.org/team-member-spotlights). Current openings are posted at [rise.org/jobs](https://rise.org/jobs).*



## John meets the huge challenges of starting a new life over in Minnesota

HAVING WORKED SINCE he was 13 years old, John Bradley's strong work ethic and pride in a job well done have been honed over many years in different career fields. Starting over in a new town with a family to support has been challenging, but given John's perseverance, it's been worth it.

Following the devastation that Hurricane Katrina wreaked on New Orleans back in 2005, John moved his four children north to Minnesota. They returned to Louisiana a few years later only to be hit by another hurricane! So this time, they packed up and moved to Minnesota for good.

Without a job or resources, John and his family moved into a homeless shelter in downtown Minneapolis and began the arduous task of rebuilding their lives in a new city. He had previously worked for the U.S. Postal Service, but a traumatic brain injury made

finding meaningful employment a real challenge.

Having been denied support benefits by the Social Security Administration (SSA), John volunteered to participate in a Supported Employment Demonstration (SED) project in April 2018. Funded by the SSA, the SED study was designed and is managed by Westat in Rockville, Md., to support people in finding employment by using and testing a variety of supports.

Rise is one of 30 agencies across the United States participating in the study and the only SED agency in Minnesota. Rise is serving 90 people through this three-year SED project.

John's team from Rise includes Employment Consultant Meghan Canono, Care Manager Sarah Crampton, and Nurse Care Coordinator Kelly Robinson. Meghan offers job follow-up; Sar-

ah is working with John to find permanent, affordable housing; and Kelly helps him manage his medications and therapy.

For the past year, John also worked with another Rise employment consultant. "Nyla [Reath] was so helpful with my job search because I didn't have a computer and the public libraries were shut down due to the pandemic," John remembers. "She helped me put together my resume, apply for jobs, practice interviewing, and handle all the paperwork.

"Because of my memory issues, Kelly was able to get me a computer tablet paid for by the Westat project which is like a portable office. That has made it so much easier for me to communicate with my team as well as remember important information and appointments so I can better prioritize my time."

John worked for four months in the hospitality / concession areas at U.S. Bank Stadium in downtown Minneapolis during Minnesota Vikings games and concerts. Then the COVID pandemic hit and the stadium closed. John kicked his job search back into high gear.

During his interview for a position with Burlington Coat Factory, John learned of the company's extensive coat donation project for people in need. "That really spoke to me as I am very involved in homelessness issues and understand the need. I wanted to work for a company that gives back to the community."

John started working at Bur-

*John enjoys his work at Burlington Coat Factory and appreciates the company's commitment to giving back to the community by donating coats and jackets to those in need.*





## Activar named MOHR's Outstanding Employer of the Year

RISE CONGRATULATES Activar in Bloomington which has been honored as this year's *Outstanding Employer of the Year* by the MOHR (Minnesota Association of Habilitation and Rehabilitation).

Activar is an American manufacturing and distribution company engaged in construction, plastic, technical, and industrial products and services.

Nine workers from Rise enjoy the fast-paced work environment at Activar. Like a well-oiled machine, they work together and alongside Active employees to produce metal wall cabinets found in businesses around the world.

"The workers from Rise bring such positivity to our workplace," said John Baker, Activar's director of Supply Chain and Manufacturing. "They work hard and we are happy to have them here."



*From left are Rise President Lynn Noren; John Baker, director of Supply Chain and Manufacturing; Rise Program Director Keith Hovland and Program Manager Cindy Cary; and Amy Omlie, Activar HR generalist. Not pictured is Rise Senior Sales Representative Nancy Hoff.*

Of the 18 companies nominated statewide, Activar stood out to the MOHR selection committee because of the interesting and challenging jobs that Rise workers do and the integral part they play

in Activar's overall production.

Rise is proud of our ongoing, mutually beneficial *'partnership that works!'* with Activar and we extend our appreciation to everyone at Activar. Congratulations!

lington as a stock clerk in March; he receives and processes incoming merchandise, stocks the sales floor, and assists customers.

"I'm an 'old-school' kind of guy," he added. "I come to work with an upbeat attitude, enjoy working with my diverse co-workers, and provide good customer service."

"John has been pleasure to work with and get to know personally," said Receiving Supervisor George Sears. "He is always a source of positive energy that fuels the team to get through the day. You would never know the adversity Mr. Bradley has had to deal

with given his positive demeanor. John leads by example and is a natural mentor."

As John can relate to anyone who shares his precarious housing situation, he has become an avid advocate for the homeless with a group called *Freedom from the Streets*. He actively works with faith leaders and community partners to increase awareness and understanding of the need for affordable housing as well as change public policies through state and local legislation and bonding. In June 2019, they recognized John with a *Community Hero* award.

"John has a go-getter attitude

and infectious personality," said SED Program Supervisor Nancee Magstad. "Combine those two qualities and you have an amazing force to be reckoned with. I think John's greatest strength is his passion for serving his community and his passion to produce results at work. I am inspired by his perseverance, grace, and work ethic."

"The Twin Cities has been THE BEST THING for me," John added. "I feel strongly about doing what I can to take positive steps toward helping those who are vulnerable and building a better community."

## Need a lift to work? may be able to get you there!

CLAIRE LOVES HER job as a dietary aid in the cafeteria at an assisted living center. But when her shifts changed and varied from weekly, her transportation service couldn't accommodate her.

Through a new partnership Rise has with the ride-share service, Lyft, Employment Consultant Nathan Rouse helped set Claire up with the ride-share service, Lyft, which not only gets her to work on time each day, but increased her independence.

Getting to work on time each day can be one of the biggest challenges someone who has a disability can face. Many must rely on public or private transportation which can be expensive and time-consuming.

"Lots of people take Lyft because they have found it to be safe and affordable," said Dan Meyers, Rise's director of Vocational Evaluation and Transitional Services. "We realized that this would be a good option for many of the people Rise serves who are working independently in community businesses. We were able to get a pilot program off the ground last year and it has been really successful."

To use Lyft to get to and from work, the person must be funded by a Medicaid waiver and have it approved by their county social worker. The rider must also have access to a cellphone to receive messages related to their rides and sign a Lyft Service Agreement.

So far, close to 30 people served by Rise are using Lyft and are



*Jesse Miner likes taking Lyft to his janitorial job at the Oakdale Hy-Vee store.*

pleased with how it works. Not only are wait times reduced, but people can also make last-minute changes without penalty.

"The partnership with Lyft and Rise has been a great addition to the menu of transportation services," said Kathy Palm, Anoka County's grants and contracts coordinator. "It has enabled individuals to obtain and maintain employment when other transportation options are not available."

Winna Bernard, a senior social worker at Washington County echoes Kathy's assessment and added this fun fact: "Using Lyft has reduced people's wait times by an average of 42 minutes a day which adds up to eight days a year! What would you do with eight extra days?!"

Rise employment consultants assist people schedule rides through a customized Lyft software app called "Concierge."

If people are hesitant at first to use Lyft, Rise's employment consultants can help train them on the service. "We do whatever it takes to get everyone comfortable," Dan explained. "Sometimes that means scheduling a Lyft ride for a parent or guardian so they can see first-hand how it works."

"Of course, safety is of the utmost importance to us," he added. "Lyft has exceptionally strict DMV and background checks, and their drivers are continually rated and reviewed to ensure they are adhering to Lyft's and the cities' requirements. They also have pandemic-related protocols so we feel really confident people are safe."

"People using Lyft have told us that they feel more independent using the service," said Natalie Zacharias, director of Rise's Day and Employment Services. "And for many, it has greatly reduced their level of anxiety over getting to work on time with little wait, while giving them more time at home."

"Based on the success shown in the first year of the partnership, Rise is sharing how it works with other service providers and counties who are considering replicating the service. We are setting up informational sessions to assist them and have even reached out to agencies in other states who are interested in this new approach to safe and reliable transportation."



## Your generous support is needed now more than ever!

In 2020, Rise was forced to pause many services at the end of March due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This resulted in significant challenges for the people we support and our team members, as well as adversely affected our financial standing.

*Barb Hokenson works at Rise Spring Lake Park.*

As we look forward to what's to come in 2021 and our 50th year as an organization, what we need now is our friends to support Rise and the people we serve. Rise's loyal supporters are so important to our programs and services for people with disabilities and other challenges throughout Minnesota and Western Wisconsin.

In this issue of the *Rise Reporter*, you'll read many stories of people continuing to achieve success in spite of the challenges we have all faced during this difficult year. This just wouldn't be possible without you, our loyal supporters.

***We rely on our supporters to rally around us!  
Please consider some of the ways you can support Rise:***

- Give by check or card by completing and returning the envelope, included here
- Give online by visiting [www.rise.org/donate](http://www.rise.org/donate)
- Set up planned giving through a bequest, will, trust, life insurance policy, retirement account, or stocks and assets
- Donate through your workplace through a fundraising campaign or employer match
- Follow Rise, and invite your friends, share our posts on:
  - o Instagram: [@rise.mn](https://www.instagram.com/rise.mn)
  - o Facebook: [www.facebook.com/Rise.Incorporated](https://www.facebook.com/Rise.Incorporated)
  - o LinkedIn: [www.linkedin.com/company/415478/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/415478/)

*For more information about the ways you can support Rise, contact Tom Brinker at [tbrinker@rise.org](mailto:tbrinker@rise.org) or 763-792-2450*

## Rise recognizes this year's Champions of the Month for



**SHANNIEL ASHFORD** was an MFIP (Minnesota Families Investment Program, the state's welfare reform program) counselor at the time of her honor; she was recently promoted to MFIP program manager. She is a strong advocate for people she serves and always seeks ways to assist people stabilize their lives in terms of employment, housing, and other key aspects of daily life. Her co-workers consider Shannel a tremendous asset to their team and say she works in the spirit of excellence. Shannel is always finding creative and innovative ways to assist people she serves. "I chose to work for Rise because I've always had an interest in helping people achieve stability and self-sufficiency while navigating through the various county programs. I like seeing positive results from the work I do with the families and am most proud when they transition off of MFIP successfully."



**LAURA BURKE's** co-workers say that she doesn't just help people find jobs, but long-term success! She is talented, compassionate, and a great advocate. In her work as an employment consultant, Laura embodies commitment, trustworthiness, honesty, humility, and goes above and beyond for the people with whom she works. Laura makes excellent employer contacts and always shares the leads with her coworkers. She started working at Rise in December 2018 and says, "I am proud to work for an organization that is truly person-centered. Rise also provides many opportunities for training and continued learning so employees are up-to-date on industry standards, local resources, and best practices. This allows us to keep growing as professionals and better serve people."



**KATIE CHAMBERS,** a case manager at Rise Coon Rapids, is a consummate professional and team-player who makes every effort to ensure that people served at Rise and their teams feel heard and respected. She says, "Rise is constantly growing as a company and making improvements to our services. There are so many opportunities to expand your learning and grow within the company. I enjoy working with the support teams to strengthen the persons-served skills and celebrating their successes. I enjoy being so involved with people's plans and implementing even more of person-centered thinking and language at Rise Coon Rapids."



**BECCA HINCKLEY** is an occupational communication specialist (OCS) with Rise's MEC program in Moorhead, serving people who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard of hearing in a large Greater Minnesota area. Her co-workers say she is independent and resourceful, consistently showing flexibility and creativity in finding solutions for the people she supports. Becca actively engages employers and co-workers to develop trust and natural supports on the job and goes out of her way to ensure people have the necessary supports in place to set them up for success in big ways. Becca develops effective relationships with community partners and referral sources and works to develop an awareness the MEC program wherever she goes.



**JENNIFER JOHNSON** is an employment consultant working out of Rise's Stillwater and Cottage Grove locations. With her background in corporate career coaching and development, as well as her upbeat and positive attitude, Jennifer has a knack for assisting others with navigating and advancing their careers. Jennifer takes the time to get to know each person and figure out the best approach to motivate them. She works with each person at their own pace, so together they can achieve their goals no matter how long it may take. Jennifer has established great working relationships with area employers as well as Washington County social workers to help ensure the people she serves are successful.



## *their outstanding work in carrying out our critical mission*



**JEANINE NORDINE**, a direct support professional, has worked out of Rise Stillwater for the past eleven years. She is known by her team mates for her dedication, will power, accountability, determination, integrity, compassion, and being person-centered driven. “The people I work with at Stillwater are the reason I work so hard and seeing them succeed and grow is the best part of my job. I think the thing I’m most proud of are the relationships that I have built with them.”



**DARLA OLSON**, a direct support professional at Rise Spring Lake Park, was recognized by her co-workers for being flexible and willing to go beyond her job responsibilities to ensure people are served well. “Darla is clever with coming up with ideas on how to build production fixtures so that people can do a production job in an alternative way. She says, “Rise is a great place to work for it gives people a place to learn new skills and helps build their self-esteem and confidence, and find employment in the community. It makes me feel good that I can be part of making a difference in someone’s life. I love working with the people we serve and working with a great team of people.”



**NATHAN ROUSE** works as an employment consultant with people who have multiple barriers to employment and who have little success in the past, getting them excited to restart their job search. Nathan brings his energy and spirit to all aspects of his position and treats everyone with the kindness and respect they deserve. “It is a rewarding experience to assist people find community employment, said Nathan. His co-workers note that Nathan is the first to volunteer for extra projects and is a great collaborator. “It’s great to go to work every day knowing that you’re working towards making the world a better place.”



**DINO SASSAN** spent 25 years in the corporate and consulting world in the human resources field before coming to work as a direct support professional at Rise Coon Rapids; he now works as a Rise employment consultant with people who have mental health issues. Dino says, “I appreciate Rise’s mission and values and get excited when the people I support enjoy their jobs and are successful.” Dino works hard to build and maintain effective working relationships with the people he serves, employers, and Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation counselors.



**MICHELLE THOMPSON** has worked at Rise Lindstrom for more than four as a placement specialist. Her co-workers say she is an outstanding team player who is detailed, dedicated, and has an amazing work ethic. Enthusiastic and positive, Michelle taps into a multitude of community and employment resources to network for the people she supports and local businesses. She says that the best part of her job is “seeing people grow through their coping skills, interpersonal skills, and of course, seeing them meet their employment goals. I am most proud when individuals get good jobs and are successful in their work.”

*Rise thanks ALL of our outstanding team members for their good work, especially during these challenging times!*

## Michael worked to help people know how to vote, make their voices heard

COMBINING HIS EXCELLENT writing skills with his interest in advocacy for disability-related issues, Michael Sack served as a senior volunteer consultant of voter accessibility for about two months, September until the election in November, with Emma Greenman's campaign. She won the Minnesota State House of Representatives (63B) seat with more than 73 percent of the votes.

Michael was tasked with reaching out and connecting with people who have disabilities and other advocates to inform them about the importance of voting.

He collaborated on and wrote an article about the voting process (both absentee and in-person); created, managed, and updated a Facebook page with informative posts; answered people's questions about the voting process; did community outreach to promote disability voting; and guided people to the appropriate materials.

"Michael was a supporter of Emma Greenman and wanted to volunteer for her campaign," explained Employment Consultant Sarah Gustafson, who assists Michael in his competitive job search and career development. "I reached out to the campaign, explaining Michael's obvious talents and perspective, and they were delighted to have him on board."

One of the biggest projects Mi-

chael worked on was creating *Roll to the Polls -- or Vote From Home: A guide to voting for people with disabilities*. This step-by-step guide was a great asset for people to ensure their voices were heard on election day.

Michael also created magnets, a t-shirt design, and bought a customized yard sign to promote voting to help spread the word on the importance of voting. His uncle, Steve Sack, is a political cartoonist with the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, and created the special artwork.

"The best part of volunteering for Emma was knowing I was educating others with disabilities on how to vote," explained Michael. "I was essentially trying to get more people with impairments to cast ballots by mail or in-person."

Gail Rosenblum, who is the editor of the *Inspired* section at the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, interviewed and wrote an article about Michael's efforts that was published on October 9, 2020.

Prior to the COVID pandemic, Michael had been working on data entry contracts and Rise administrative tasks for the past nine years at Rise Bloomington. His team appreciated his solid work ethic and attention to detail.

Currently, Michael is working part-time as a writer for Finley's Barkery whose goal is to create



paid employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The maker and distributor of pet treats dedicates 50 percent of its net profits to initiatives which provide employment training, accessibility, health and wellness, and advocacy platforms for people with disabilities.

Finley's Barkery is building their social media presence and hired Michael to coordinate with their public relations team to write for their blog once a month on issues related to the disability community.

An avid sports enthusiast, Michael is also the co-creator and writer of a blog, *Two Men On*, which he writes with his pal, Sam Graves. Since January 2010, the two have written about the Minnesota Twins, baseball, accessibility, and other relevant areas of interest.

Sarah will continue to support Michael in his employment journey. His goal is a career in journalism or data entry.

## Donatelle finds Rise workers bring positive energy to workplace

THROUGHOUT DONATELLE Plastics, Inc.'s expansive, brightly lit manufacturing facility in New Brighton, people are hard at work producing millions of different components and devices to support patients around the world.

Rise workers perform a number of subassembly tasks, quality check products, as well as prepare products for packaging and shipping. Each job they do requires fine attention to detail and quality workmanship.

Nancy Hoff, Rise's senior sales representative, knew Dave Blaido, Donatelle's manufacturing manager for Molding and Assembly Operations, from when Dave had worked at another company that had a team of Rise workers. Because of his prior success with Rise, Dave was interested in putting together a work team at Donatelle.

Nancy collaborated with Dave as well as Donatelle's Human Resources team members Brian Walli and Ashley Dominicak, and Vice President of Manufacturing Operations Matt Knutson, to determine what kinds of jobs people from Rise could do and who would be best suited for the positions.

"The job tasks are great and the Donatelle staff have been super to work with," said Nancy. "Since we started there in June of 2019, they have gotten to know our capabilities and we have added several work duties."

"As with all employees we try to make sure we assign them jobs that match their skills and set



*Margaret Keultjes quality checks medical devices and components prior to them being packaged and shipped for patients worldwide.*

them up for success," said Dave. "We want people to be comfortable with the jobs as well as assign work that can be challenging to increase their skills and confidence. People from Rise are very engaged and take a lot of pride in their work."

Rise Direct Support Professional Kaitlyn Thompson says the wide range of job tasks is something the team of four enjoys the most. "There is a family-like environment here that we truly feel part of. Donatelle employees are kind and appreciative of our work."

"I like everything I do here," said Denise Stillings. "It's really interesting and I like that my work helps patients get better."

Amy Pancake (*shown at the right*) considers the work they do very important. Her favorite jobs are working on surgical instruments and probes.

Molding Supervisor Peter Sellers works with Kaitlyn to determine what types of skills each per-

son has, and what jobs they may be successful in, and an appropriate workload.

"Then we 'buddy them up' with other Donatelle employees for training until they are comfortable with the tasks," Peter explained. "The quality of their work has matched and sometimes exceeded the average employee. They bring positive attitudes, a solid work ethic, and improvements to our work culture."

Facilities Engineer Matt Call said when he realized how well Rise workers were doing out on the production floor and had an opening for a custodian, he decided to put Allen Jenkins in the position to do cleaning, sanitizing, stocking, and recycling tasks.

"Allen is dependable, keeps busy all day, and does good work," said Matt. Allen noted that he likes his work, has fun and helpful coworkers, and plans to work at Donatelle for a very long time.

"Rise provides us with a great workforce that we can count on," Dave added. "They bring a positive energy to the workplace and their dependability is second to none."



## 21 Roots Farm provides nurturing, transforming environment for Kristi

DESPITE THE INITIAL snowflakes of what would end up being an October record snowfall the following day, Kristi Quammen was excited to spend the afternoon at the 21 Roots Farm in Grant, Minnesota, just outside of Stillwater. After greeting Oats, her favorite barn cat, she led the way across the farm yard, eager to gather freshly laid eggs from the chicken coop.

With a basket of five pastel-colored eggs, Kristi then made her way over to the pen where she lured two cows, Snickers and Sir, over for some just-picked apples from the orchard.

21 Roots Farm co-founders Amy Peterson and Brittany Wiitala, along with associate Laura Lutz, offer high-quality nature- and agriculture-based programming to assist people with developmental disabilities cultivate a sense of purpose and community. In addition to gardens, fields, and orchards,

*Kristi feeds Sir a freshly picked apple from the orchard. Co-founders and staff, Brittany Wiitala, Laura Lutz, and Amy Peterson didn't seem to mind the chilly day on their beautiful farm outside Stillwater.*

*Above: Earlier this summer, Kristi picked carrots from the huge garden - YUM!*



the farm is home to alpacas, goats, chickens, donkeys, and barn cats.

With her part-time job as a lobby attendant at Beef O'Brady's restaurant in Andover on hold due to the pandemic, Kristi also stays connected remotely with the team at Rise Coon Rapids.

Kristi has been coming to 21 Roots Farm since the fall of 2019. As her interest in gardening and other farm activities grew, Kristi and her mom Karen have been making the one-hour drive to 21 Roots Farm from their home in Andover about three times a week.

Follow-Up Specialist Pam Satek meets with Kristi every Monday to help ensure her continued progress at the farm. Kristi also has done volunteer work with one-on-one supports from Pam at Feed My Starving Children in Coon Rapids and Global Health Ministries in Fridley.

Brittany, Laura, and Amy have



experience in both farming and working with people who have disabilities and are passionate about their mission. They officially began operations in the spring of 2019, and since then, have had more than a thousand visitors participate in customized activities designed to help people grow and flourish in this natural environment.

“Working at the farm has been an amazing way for Kristi to grow and expand her potential in a truly nurturing environment,” said Pam. “She really enjoys contributing to the many farming and gardening tasks and loves the animals and people she has met here, too.”

Kristi's mom, Karen, said the times spent at 21 Roots Farm have been life-changing for both of them.

“Kristi is in all her glory – she just fell in love with this place and feels like she just belongs here. The farm has opened up so many new

*~Continued on bottom of page 15~*



## *Jacob's co-workers appreciate his attention to detail, solid work ethic*

WITH HOMEOWNERS servicing their lawn mowers to be stowed away for the season and then tuning up and preparing their snowblowers for the coming winter, Medart CPD in Anoka is a busy place. As a distributor of more than 40,000 small engines, parts and equipment for lawnmowers and snowblowers, employees fill and ship out orders for customers across the country.

Jacob Bohm has just the right skills to be part of the hard-work-



ing Medart team. His co-workers appreciate that he is detail-oriented, dependable, and meticulous in the work he does.

He is also a quick learner and self-starter, Warehouse Supervisor Tammy Wittmer noted. "Jacob usually arrives about fifteen minutes early so he is ready to clock in on time and get right to work. He does a great job and is a hard worker."

Jacob typically fills at least thirty orders during his five-hour shifts, Monday through Thursday. Taking incoming orders, he scans them into a computer which gives him detailed information as to the aisle numbers where the specific parts are located in the expansive warehouse.

"I usually do about six orders at a time which helps cut down on extra walking and time," said Jacob. "Each order usually has five

or six parts so I always carefully double-check them to make sure they're right before I turn them over to the people who ship them out. We work together as a team."

After four years of working his first-ever job in a retail environment, Jacob decided earlier this year that he was ready for a change. Sue Featherly, a Rise employment consultant and follow-up specialist, assisted Jacob, who is 23, in his career planning, job search, and interviewing; he started work at Medart in August.

"I knew Jacob would fit in well at Medart because he is such a hard worker and so reliable," said Sue, who checks in about twice a month to help ensure that things continue to go well on the job. "It is great to see how much he enjoys his work and is building good working relationships with the others."

In his free time, Jacob enjoys video and computer games. He would like to perhaps work in the computer field and may pursue that career field someday.

*Jacob uses a hydraulic lift to reach products high in the warehouse.*

experiences and possibilities for her."

One of the side benefits for Kristi, her mom noted, is that she spends so much time outside and gets good exercise. In addition, spending time at the farm has cultivated an interest in gardening for both mother and daughter as well as eating more fresh vegetables!

Pam and Karen both noted that the biggest change in Kristi from

her experiences at 21 Roots Farm is her increased self-confidence and ability to express herself.

"She is also forming relationships with others and enjoys being part of a team to get farm and gardening chores done," Pam said.

"It's been truly amazing to see the transformation in Kristi over the year that she has been coming here," said Karen. "She has learned so much here and developed trans-

ferable skills that could possibly lead to employment in the farming area or agricultural places."

"What a privilege it is to see Kristi flourish at 21 Roots Farm!" said Amy. "Our dreams are coming true right before our eyes."

For more information about 21 Roots Farm, check out their website at [21rootsfarm.org](http://21rootsfarm.org) and watch some videos at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=erBLdIau\\_OY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=erBLdIau_OY).



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*Thanksgiving gifts for a delicious dinner!*

FOR THE NINTH YEAR, employees at Cummins Power Generation raised funds through special events and donations to purchase and grocery shop for all the makings of a complete Thanksgiving dinner, plus a \$25 grocery store gift card. Three years ago, Ruan and Bobcat employees joined them in this huge project. This year, 150 families served by Rise received these special holiday dinner gifts. Rise serves many people who are proud to work at these great companies. Our partnerships with Ruan, Bobcat, and Cummins help make our communities stronger. We so appreciate their kind generosity and support. *Happy Holidays!*



*Representing many great employees at Ruan, Bobcat, and Cummins, these people brought over dinner groceries for 150 families: Shruthi Poppler, Gayle Gruber, Todd Peterson, Monica Carroll, Karleigh Bebeau, and Sean Kvidera.*