

50 RISE YEARS 1971-2021 REPORTER

WINTER 2022 VOL. 46, NO. 04



photo: Tilt Photography

COVER STORY

Hannah McDonald works to package fruit at Bix Produce in Little Canada. Rise supports two employment teams here. Our community job programs are set to grow as we announce a continued shift from center-based work to community employment.



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Happy New Year!

All of us at Rise wish you and your family a very happy New Year as we look forward to 2023! The pace at which the years go by seems so incredibly fast to me as time goes on. When I think back over the past 40-plus years I have been with the organization, the one true constant for us has always been continued innovation and change. We embrace change at Rise and we are excited that the people we are so proud to serve have so many opportunities today to live lives filled with purpose and pride.

For many years now, we have been working to grow community-based services, specifically employment services, through partnerships with businesses that have welcomed people who have disabilities into their workforce. Just like the career path we have taken in our own lives, there are often many different paths taken by those we support to find the right job match. It is inspiring to see people thrive in community employment. We know that today our economy needs everyone who wants to work, and we strongly believe all people should have opportunities to become part of the workforce.

After working to decrease our reliance on center-based employment and the use of special minimum wage for many years, Rise is now planning for the end of center-based employment services by the spring of 2024. Our decision to end the service at Rise is not a judgment on whether it is good or bad. Instead, it is in recognition that it is not likely a model that will continue to be supported by state and federal policy in the future. States across the nation have been moving away from center-based work for many years, including Minnesota and Wisconsin, supporting instead the move to more community-based alternatives. We feel strongly that people need to have sustainable choices regarding their future services. Our team is ready to provide the support people need during this transition and we are working closely to develop individual successful employment paths for each person we serve who is currently in center-based employment and interested in continuing to work.

We also know that not everyone we work with at Rise has chosen to work in the community or will choose that in the future. We have developed a robust set of day and life enrichment services to assure individuals can be part of the community in new and fulfilling ways.

I hope you know that while change can be hard, we're all in this together! Everything we do at Rise is supported by person-centered values and aspirations. Please feel free to reach out to me any time if you want to talk about Rise's future plans. Your input is valued and appreciated.

Lynn Noren
Rise President & CEO

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.





CONTENTS

- 02 Rise Happenings
- 03 Virtual Job Training
- 04 Employment Pgm. Changes
- 08 Family Perspective
- 10 Celebrate Rise Recap
- 16 Volunteer Spotlight

STAFF

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- Lynn Noren**
President & CEO
- Noel McCormick**
Vice President of Advancement
- Kelly Bartnick**
Communications and Volunteer Manager; Editor

Correction:

Our 2021-2022 Champions of the Month wrap-up in the previous issue incorrectly quoted Kimberly Washington's colleague. The correct quote is below.



DECEMBER, 2021
KIMBERLY WASHINGTON,
EMPLOYMENT CONSULTANT

"Kimberly truly strives to see the best in people and encourages them to believe in themselves and makes them feel empowered and understood."

SPRING LAKE PARK HY-VEE NAMED AN OUTSTANDING EMPLOYER



(left to right) Hy-Vee Human Resources manager Shane Everson, Rise Program Director Dan Meyers, Hy-Vee District Area Manager Chad Adams and Rise President and CEO Lynn Noren pose with the 2022 award.

Our employment partner, Hy-Vee in Spring Lake Park was named an outstanding employer for 2022 by the Minnesota Organization for Habilitation and Rehabilitation (MOHR).

Rise is a MOHR member and nominated the store for the award, which honors companies that go above and beyond to provide quality work opportunities and supportive and inclusive policies and practices for employees with disabilities.

The Outstanding Employer Awards were chosen in October, coinciding with National Disability Employment Awareness

Month. These awards are one of the many ways MOHR recognizes the valuable role organizations play in employing people with disabilities and providing them with a sense of community and accomplishment.

"Hy-Vee is outstanding," said Rise Program Director Dan Meyers. "They truly believe in employment for all and work with us to create employment opportunities that set people we support up for success. The team there is flexible and open to working with everyone. We value their partnership." ▼



<<HOLIDAY MUSIC

Ted Brown brought his musical talents to the annual holiday celebration of our community-based training and employment programs. Brown and his band were the featured entertainment at the annual event, which packed Banquets of Minnesota in Fridley, Minn. earlier this month. Brown received employment and support services with us beginning in the 1970s. ▼



<<GIVING THANKS

Our partners from Cummins and Ruan/Bobcat once again generously provided Thanksgiving meals to support people we serve. The groups donated more than 240 meals this year--the most ever. The need continues to increase each year, and we are so grateful for their continued and generous support. ▼



<<HARVEST CELEBRATION

We ended our summer excursions to 21 Roots Farm in Washington County with a special harvest celebration and meal in September. Several groups attended the farm throughout the summer to learn about farm life, including animals needs, agriculture occupations, farm-to-table nutrition and more. ▼

photo: Nicole Conti

VIRTUAL REALITY ALLOWS CAREER AND COMMUNITY EXPLORATION

SID CLARKE, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Why guess what a job will be like when it's possible to experience the work long before landing an interview?

Thanks to some out-of-the-box thinking (and new technology), we can now provide job training, interview simulations, and travel into our communities and around the world through our virtual reality, or VR, training program. The grant-funded initiative uses technology to simulate “real-world” situations as people prepare for new opportunities. This type of training is especially helpful to those who are working to achieve employment goals for the first time.

“New jobs can be scary for anybody, and the VR training programs ease some of that anxiety so people in our programs can walk into their first day, or that first interview, and feel confident,” says our Crystal, Minn. Program Manager Samantha Trebtocke.

Wendell Eric Petersen attends day services in Crystal. He says exploring workplace situations via a VR headset helps him feel comfortable with the idea of community employment. His favorite thing about using the VR equipment is taking virtual tours, including journeys to faraway places, like Japan.

“Trips” like Petersen’s are one way we are using VR technology beyond job development pursuits. Petersen enjoys experiencing other cultures and taking part in activities that can be difficult or impossible for people who have physical limitations. Simulations include skydiving, hiking, and riding roller coasters in addition to touring the world and learning about customs, languages, food, and more.

We are also planning to use VR technology for therapeutic purposes during the winter months when Seasonal Affective Disorder challenges many of the people we support. Having an opportunity to immerse themselves in a different reality—such as

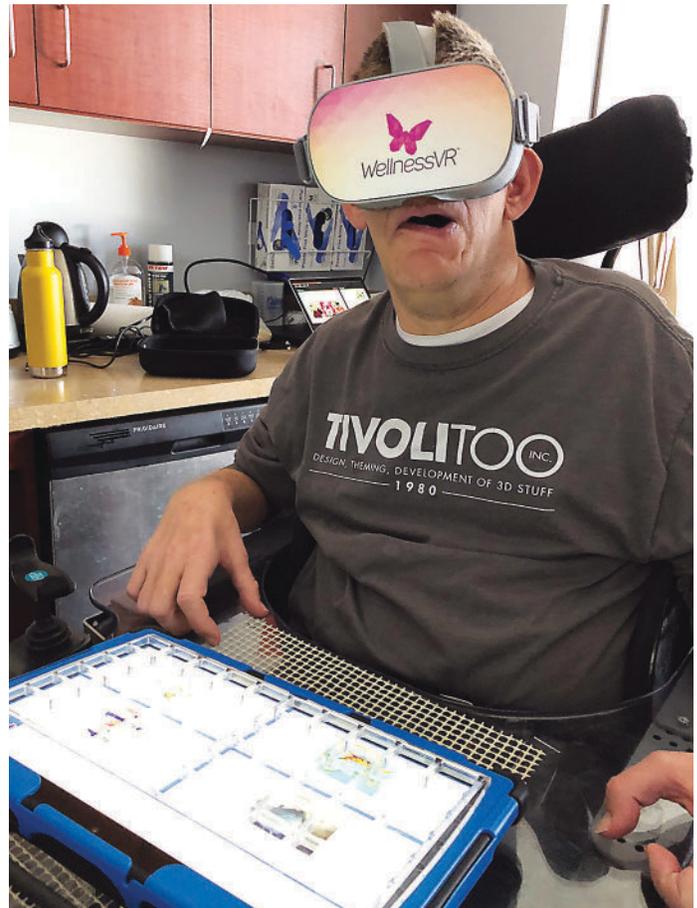


photo: Samantha Trebtocke

Wendell Eric Petersen takes a virtual tour of Japan from- our Crystal, Minn. location. The virtual reality headset allows people to experience new places and train for upcoming work opportunities and interviews from any location.

walking through a warm valley of flowers or passing a waterfall—strengthens mental health during long, dark Midwestern winters.

Virtual Reality technology is clearly a very powerful tool, and the possibilities seem endless. Our team members work hard to create these kinds of experiences, and we are proud of their continued work and innovative thinking. ▼

FINDING COMMUNITY-BASED ALTERNATIVES TO CENTER-BASED WORK

This change reduceS our reliance on center-based production work and eliminates special minimum wage.



courtesy photos

Ade (right) and Leah (left) both recently began their first community-based jobs. Ade calls his Merchology position a “dream job.” There he works to keep the office spaces neat and tidy. Leah began at the Forest Lake, Minn. YMCA about six months ago. With assistance and support from her employment consultant and her supervisor, Leah is making big strides. Congratulations to both Ade and Leah!

The phrase, “A partnership that works” has floated around Rise for decades. As historic sayings go, those four words perfectly sum up our services.

More than 50 years ago, our founding happened because of community partnerships that formed based on an entirely new idea of what was possible for all people, including those with disabilities. Partnerships grew, and Rise began offering robust center-based work opportunities. Over time, we’ve expanded our relationships to add community-based

employment opportunities with competitive wages, which in recent years have grown stronger.

Now we are on the verge of another partnership shift. Over the next 16 months, our center-based employment programs will be phased out in favor of community-based programs. We anticipate this change to be complete by April 2024.

WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN?

This is a significant change for all of Rise, especially our production operations in Spring Lake

Park, Oakdale and New Richmond, Wisc., which are impacted most. Center-based jobs that typically pay a special minimum wage (wages allowed by the Federal Government through a special certificate to pay people less than minimum wage based on their productivity) will be phased out as we develop new partnerships and alternatives to allow even more community employment options.

“Policies, laws, and funding at the state and federal levels are changing,” said Chief Program Officer Tim Dickie. “The focus has

TOP 5

WAYS WE'RE ALREADY ADVANCING COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT:

1.

Over the last four years, Rise has assisted more than 125 people moving from center-based or group community employment to competitive employment

2.

Stopped developing community employment sites paying less than minimum wage

3.

Converted several existing sites to minimum wage

4.

Consolidated center-based production operations in Anoka and Washington counties

5.

Increased efforts to help people move from special minimum wage work to competitive employment

moved to community integration and competitive employment as a preferred option for people with disabilities. Reducing center-based work offerings allows us to move closer to that goal.”

Federally, the US Commission on Civil Rights is asking Congress to end special minimum wages because the commission believes the program “limits people with disabilities from realizing their full potential.” Here at home, several disability organizations consistently lobby to end special minimum wages, and both Minnesota and Wisconsin (and many other states) have adopted new policies that advocate for more competitive and integrated employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Because there are so many change efforts underway at both

the Federal and state levels, we believe a legislative mandate to end special minimum wage will be enacted within the next few years.

“At one time, Rise was one of the largest employers using special minimum wage exceptions in the United States”, said Rise President and CEO Lynn Noren. “We have worked strategically over the past few years to significantly decrease that number from a high of more than 700 people, to fewer than 200 individuals in center-based employment today. We feel strongly that it is critical to continue to take these final steps in the next 16 months, to proactively support every individual we serve to transition away from center-based employment in a planned way, instead of waiting for official mandates that may not allow adequate time for the transition.

(continued on pg. 6)



Production work happening at our Spring Lake Park, Minn. location in the 1990s. You can see the phrase “A Partnership that works!” prominently displayed on the wall.

Rise archive photo



CHANGES ARE UNDERWAY

Over the past four-and-a-half years, we have assisted more than 125 people in moving from center-based or group community employment to competitive employment. We have worked with existing production partners to transition their work to supported employment SET sites and are also developing new SET sites. Rise Direct Support Professionals currently working with our production teams will also be given opportunities to transition to community-based employment sites or program locations.

We are also developing a more comprehensive menu of day services to include a variety of meaningful learning opportunities and

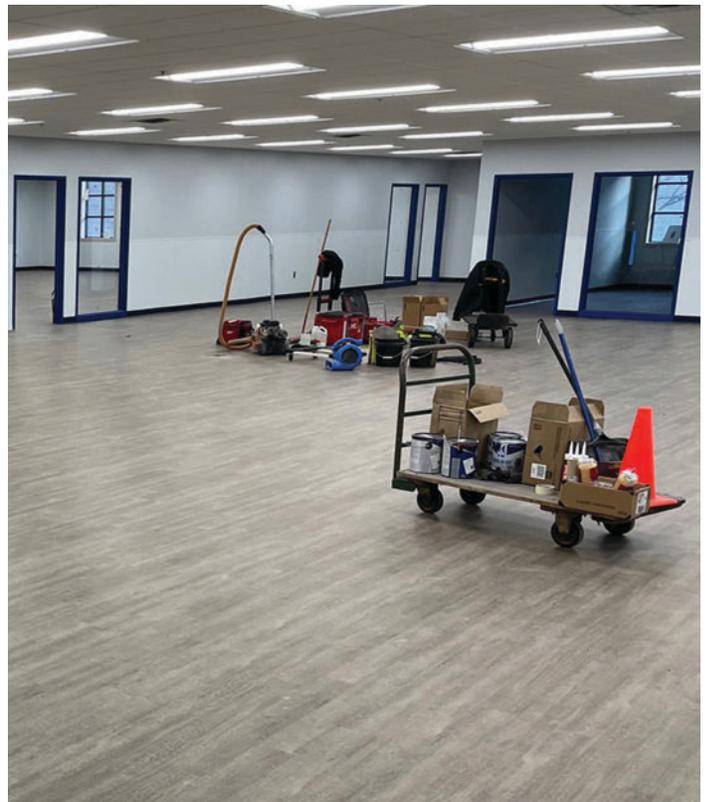
community-based activities for people who choose these options over work.

“There will be more opportunities to participate in small group skill-building activities, enjoy art and sensory activities, utilize technology, participate in social activities, volunteer at other local organizations, and engage in continued supports toward other employment and life enrichment goals,” Dickie said.

Those who are affected by these changes have already been notified. This transition will be open and transparent because we know the anxiety change can bring. “People will not be left behind,” said Noren. “Our team is ready to provide the support people expect

during this transition, and we are working closely to develop individual successful employment and enrichment paths for each person we serve who is currently in center-based employment and is now making decisions about their future,” she said.

“We recognize the uncertainty that this news might bring,” Noren said. “At the same time we are also excited about the new opportunities it will create for people to make living wages, and become more familiar with their friends, neighbors, and new coworkers. That’s why we do the work we do and why we continue creating new business partnerships because they really do work!” ▼





FINDING WORK SUCCESS

CELEBRATING FIRST DAYS AND EMPLOYMENT MILESTONES

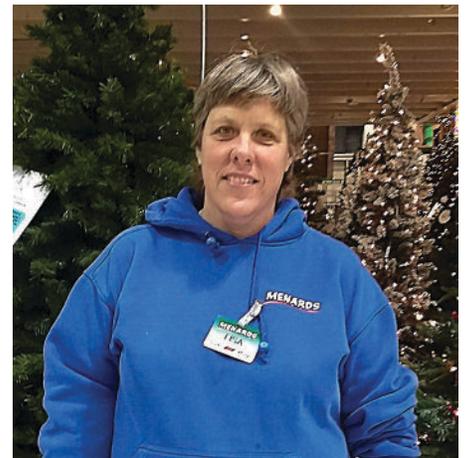


<< FIRST DAY IN A COMMUNITY JOB

Lori Mayo recently began working in her first independent community job! She's loving her role as a Finley's Brand Ambassador at the Brooklyn Park Hy-Vee. Using her assistive communication device, Lori greets shoppers with a warm welcome while introducing them to new products. Her ambassador partner, Ryan, follows up on any questions. Keep up the amazing work, Lori!

20 YEARS OF SERVICE >>

Lisa Glamm was recently recognized for two decades of service at Menards in Oak Park Heights, Minn. She began her career as a cart attendant and is now working in the receiving/stocking department where she unloads trucks, collects and disposes cardboard, faces products on shelves and keeps the store tidy. Lisa enjoys the summer season from May through October when she can be outside. She hopes to stay at Menards until she retires. Congratulations, Lisa!



<< A YEAR ON THE JOB

Pearl recently celebrated her one year anniversary working at Walburger's Café located inside Hy-Vee. Her favorite part of her job is interacting with customers, especially getting to know her 'regulars.'

Rise Employment Consultant Dayna Gulley notes Pearl's gracious smile, happy spirit, dependability, and desire to succeed. Outside of work, Pearl travels the world! Her latest destination was the Panama Canal. How exciting! Congratulations on your work anniversary, Pearl!

(Opposite page)

Our Coon Rapids location reopened in the Spring of 2022 after a big remodel. The former open production floor (bottom left) is now finished spaces for day program life enrichment activities and skill development (bottom right). This is one example of changes we are making as we eliminate center-based work.



1 2 3 4 5 QUESTIONS with **family** BREAKING DOWN EMPLOYMENT MYTHS

Lori Dukek: On finding “the right fit”

Ally Dukek often talked about working with children. Yet childcare is a competitive industry with a particularly high number of obstacles, especially for people who have disabilities. Barriers can include bias, discrimination and technical challenges, among others.

At first, Ally’s mother, Lori Dukek, was hesitant about her daughter’s interest in childcare. She worried Ally wouldn’t be supported or accepted in the ways that she deserves. But Ally was persistent, and eventually received her first position in childcare. Her first job wasn’t the right fit, and the childcare center was not accommodating to her. Eventually, her hours were cut.

But Ally didn’t give up. She persisted and soon began work at a new childcare facility. Ally is now at a place where coworkers and supervisors welcome her. She is valued, respected, and fulfilled by following her passion.



photo: Tilt Photography

ALLY DUKEK

Employer:
*New Horizon Academy,
Savage, Minn.*

Ally Dukek was named a Rise’ing star in 2022. She is pictured (left) with Rise President and CEO Lynn Noren and Chief Program Officer Tim Dickie at the 2022 Celebrate Rise Gala.



photo: Brian Tanning

**Q: What concerns did you have about Ally exploring a competitive position?**

A: “I never doubted Ally herself- I knew she had the skills to be in a competitive field. What I really doubted was whether she would be able to find a working environment that supported her and accepted her. Unfortunately, some people are simply not comfortable around people with disabilities, and that makes finding a good environment really hard.”

Q: What was the job search like for Ally?

A: “Ally’s Work Consultant, Sarah Gustafson, helped Ally out with finding positions and interviewing. Sarah was really pivotal in Ally finding the job she’s in now.”

Q: What challenges did Ally face, joining in a competitive role?

A: “I wouldn’t say that she found a perfect fit right away. She worked for some people who just weren’t very understanding of her needs. The people she works for now are a lot more understanding and accomodating, but there were still certain barriers that made it hard for her to get there. One thing she faced was the CPR and First Aid training requirements. They couldn’t really make any additional accommodations for her, so she had to pass them on her own. I think Sarah helped a lot with that, and helped Ally get through the certifications she needed.”

Q: You must be really proud of Ally:

A: “Yes, her persistence has really paid off. She’s worked hard, and now I think she’s working somewhere that makes her really happy and accommodates her needs.”

Q: What advice do you have for families who are exploring competitive employment?

A: “You know, I think a lot of it is trial and error. If one situation doesn’t work out, don’t give up. It might not be your loved one’s limitations that’s slowing them down. It might be the limitations of society just not being comfortable yet with people with disabilities. I think that most of the time, in the right work environment, people with disabilities can do any kind of work they want to. It just has to be the right fit.” ▼



“ I never doubted Ally. I knew she had the skills... what I really doubted was whether she’d be able to find a working environment that accepted her. ”

-Lori Dukek

CELEBRATE



Thank you to the 350 guests, sponsors and volunteers who joined in the fun at our annual Celebrate Rise Gala held October 27, 2022 at the Minneapolis Marriott Northwest.



MORE THAN \$142,000 RAISED!

We recognized some outstanding people and raised thousands through auctions and donations.

But the big winner of the night was our advancing lives fund, which pays up to \$500 for personal and professional items not covered by other funding sources.

Learn about our award winners on pages 11-15.



photos: Brian Tanning

RISE'ING STARS



Ally Dukek has always wanted to work with children, though doctors and family had doubts she would fit into an independent, community-based job due to her disability. Her first placement in a daycare center was a disappointment when she and her employers and coworkers struggled to work together. But again, she continued forward to a new job, which was cut short by the COVID-19 pandemic. Dukek eventually began another position at New Horizon Academy in Savage, where she has found success.

She is now independent and doing the work she's dreamed of. She is skilled at handling uncooperative babies and challenging toddlers like a pro. She continues to work against the odds, defining herself on her own terms.

Wendy Ensign loves art and her friends. When she arrived at Rise in 2018, she indicated that she would love to have a position someday involving art but knew it might not be possible. After several interviews, Wendy began a new job sorting jewelry for Goodwill, which delighted her. The position also required her to challenge herself and learn new skills. Wendy trained tirelessly, including studying at home and working with Rise support staff. She began to excel and continues to thrive at Goodwill where she has also developed a strong network of friends. In June, the company created a new full-time position for her.



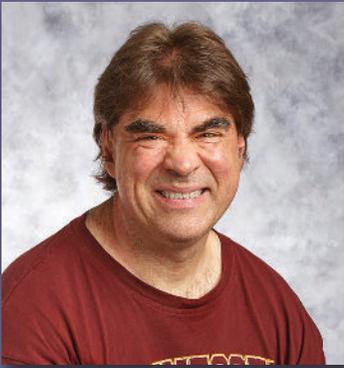
Wendy's positive outlook and determination have led her to great success. She brings a sunny attitude with her wherever she goes and is a positive influence on all who know her.



Allen Jenkins working with his hands and excels with independent work. In 2019, he began a janitorial job at Donatelle. Office workers there say his thorough work stands out above other others in keeping their spaces clean and sanitized, and that became even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic. Allen has been working hard to break out of his shell at work and is making wonderful progress making friends.

Allen is driven, focused, and committed. He works with the same level of excellence every day without fail, even despite personal hardship when his mother recently passed away. He is an example to others as a model of resilience.

RISE'ING STARS

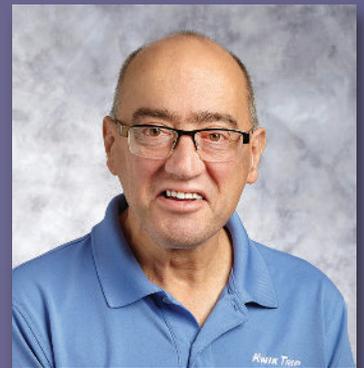


Chris Krause is resilient through challenges. When health issues forced him to leave a community employment position he loved and transfer to our Spring Lake Park production location, Chris was patient and persistent. That patience, along with a strong work ethic and positive attitude, led him to a new position packing critical medical materials at Medline in Rogers, Minn.

He goes above and beyond at work, and Medline managers say his efficient work is valuable to their efficiency. He is a source of positivity wherever he goes and is known for his cheerful “Good Morning!” greetings each day.

Kevin Symanitz is a natural leader who has held a variety of jobs, including retail, grocery, and customer service, while searching for an environment that best fits his skills and interests. After many months of searching, Kevin accepted a position at Kwik Trip. Kevin is passionate about his work and customers compliment his work ethic. Kevin’s supervisors call him an invaluable team member. Kevin refuses to be limited by his mental health challenges and works daily to overcome them.

And he has grown throughout his time receiving support at Rise, developing skills that empower him to advocate for himself in the workplace while challenging himself to try new things.



TOLLEFSON AWARD



Krishnakumar Iyer



Shruthi Poppler

Krishnakumar S. Iyer and **Shruthi Poppler** support Rise through their employer Cummins, which has allowed for so many support opportunities through the years. Cummins helped create innovative remote services programming, when Cummins employees from several countries, including, the US, China, UK, Germany and Turkey helped us provide more than 60 hours of online education experiences. *(continued on pg. 13)*

CHAMPIONS OF THE MISSION



Jebb Anderson has a variety of skills in his “tool belt” and plenty of passion for Rise’s mission which enables him to provide support in many ways. He joined our team 12 years ago. Working as a “float” in our Hennepin County CBTE programs, Jebb goes where he is needed most each day. He is known to many at Rise as an innovative job trainer and is gifted with setting the tone for a great work environment right from the start.

Team members admire the example Jebb sets each day. He is hard-working and cares a great deal about the people we support. Jebb is an excellent Rise ambassador to all the employers he visits in our community.



April Holman is a seven-year veteran Direct Support Professional in Crystal. Her experience also gives her exceptional knowledge of the people we support, which her colleagues say makes her a standout resource they depend on for coaching through daily support needs, activities, goal setting, and more. She knows people extremely well because she has spent so much time with them.

April also leads Rise outings and activities and is known by her fellow teammates as “just a great coworker.” She is dependable, respectful, and kind.

They provide valuable in-person volunteer support too, organizing our annual Thanksgiving holiday meal program, spearheaded by Shruthi. To date, that program has provided more than 1,000 families with Thanksgiving meals.

Their support also allows us to meet with Cummins’ executive leadership and secure new grant funding sources and programs.



photo: Brian Tanning

EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR



Integer

Rise and Integer's relationship has continued to grow since our partnership began in 2018. People we support work with Integer on a variety of technical and mechanical projects, and managers regularly communicate the team's importance in their industrial process.

Over the years, Integer has made changes which resulted in position changes on the Rise team. Integer has been supportive and helpful through those transitions. They emphasize skill development, are receptive to feedback, and always go above and beyond to support Rise.



Carondelet Village Presbyterian Homes

Presbyterian Homes has had a relationship with Rise since 2016.

Currently, a team of four workers visits Carondelet Village in St. Paul each day, supporting kitchen staff in washing dishes, tidying up certain areas, and doing some light cleaning. Amber and the team have created a positive and supportive environment. They treat our Rise team like their own, making our workers feel welcomed and appreciated every day.



photos: Brian Tanning

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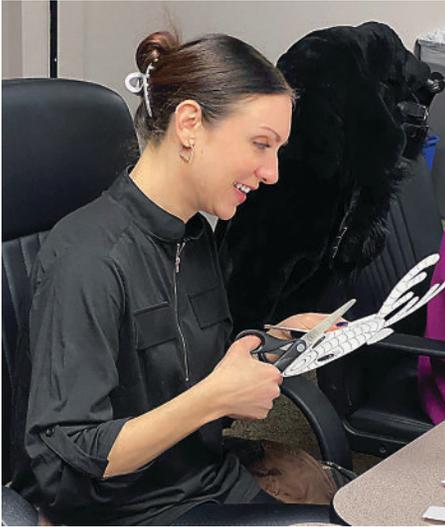
Mark Bergmann, Anne Holoch, Lauri Hopkins,
Krishnakumar Subramonia Iyer, Susan Langfeldt,
Sheila Minske, Dan Newman, Cliff Rhoten,
Kelly Steffens



photo: Brian Tanning

Outgoing board member Mark Bergmann (center) is recognized by Board Chair Kathy Klang (right) and Rise President and CEO Lynn Noren (left).

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



<<ART SPEAKS PREP

We want to give a HUGE shout out to our partners at nVent and Brown and Brown Insurance who joined us in November and December to volunteer for our Art Speaks Art Therapy program. The two groups donated nearly 40 hours assisting with art therapy preparations.



Join us in 2023!

Now signing up volunteers for the New Year.

Email volunteers@rise.org



MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Chester Tollefson joins the century club in January!

Joins us in January as we celebrate the 100th Birthday of Rise founder Chester Tollefson. We have several activities and events planned to commemorate this significant milestone.

Like and follow us on Facebook and Instagram to learn about the special celebrations as we announce them.

Rise founder Chester Tollefson, 99, (left) and son David Tollefson pose with a commemorative plaque at our 2022 Celebrate Rise Gala.



photo: Brian Tanning



MINN POST - OCT. 24
LYNN NOREN AND CHRISTIN HANSON, SERVED BY RISE, WERE FEATURED IN A STORY ABOUT DSP STAFFING SHORTAGES

FIND THE STORY AT [RISE.ORG/](https://rise.org/)



WCCO TV made a stop at our Crystal, Minn. location to talk about journalism occupations. Andy Zaczkowski (center) is pictured with Wcco's Susan-Elizabeth Littlefield (right) and photographer Joe Berglove (left).

photo: Nicole Conti



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HAPPY
NEW YEAR

The text "HAPPY NEW YEAR" is written in a white, sans-serif font on a dark blue background. The letters are decorated with small, colorful stars and dots in shades of pink, green, orange, and teal. To the right of the word "HAPPY" is a graphic of a gift box, also decorated with the same colorful geometric patterns as the other elements on the page. The gift box has a teal ribbon tied around it.