



## News from THE WALLACE GROUP

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### **PROACT NAMES FOUR EMPLOYERS OF THE YEAR FOR 2012**

**Nonprofit serving people with disabilities selects Asset Marketing Services, Chuck & Don's Pet Food Outlet, IMV Technologies USA and Peanut's Place as exceptional employers for people with developmental disabilities**

A variety of businesses were chosen for this year's ProAct Employer of the Year awards, with honors going to Asset Marketing Services in Burnsville, IMV Technologies USA in Maple Grove, Chuck & Don's Pet Food Outlet in Eagan, and Eagan-based Peanut's Place, which provides animal boarding and grooming services.

Winners were chosen in four employer categories: Business Partner, Community Employment, Supported Employment and Vocational Partner. The businesses were part of ProAct's 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Awards Dinner in early October. Featuring KSTP News Anchor Megan Newquist, the event attracted more than 550 to the Prom Center in Oakdale.

"Employers are at the heart of our mission, which is to provide training and job opportunities for people with developmental disabilities," said ProAct President and CEO Steven Ditschler. "We value their partnership, and the solid relationships that have been established."

## **ProAct Employers of the Year/page two**

Winning recognition in the Business Partner category, IMV Technologies USA uses individuals from ProAct for packaging and labeling services. These employees wear protective clothing, which also provides a clean environment for IMV products. The company also trusts ProAct to cover quality assurance functions, which has resulted in a marked increase in IMV customers' satisfaction, explains Greg Pechman, ProAct sales manager. The work involves people with a wide range of abilities, which makes it ideal for ProAct's workers.

IMV's Eric Salonen, who serves in supply chain and operations in Maple Grove, said the company's animal breeding products require a sterile environment and it found an efficient packaging solution in ProAct. "They are a very impressive organization with a good staff who are very enthusiastic about the work they do for their clients. We felt immediately that it was a good fit," Salonen said. IMV's large volume products are highly cost sensitive, and ProAct made the packaging economical, he explained.

The second winner, for the Community Employment category, is Asset Marketing Services in Burnsville. The company has multiple product lines, and employs crews from ProAct for inspection and packaging. Product handling at Asset requires great attention to detail, said Amy Wenstrom, director of inbound fulfillment.

"We are really excited and honored ... we feel like we have such a great partnership with them," she said. Work with Asset began in 2011 and has since expanded, but remains flexible to company needs. "We couldn't ask for anything better as far as that goes," Wenstrom said. "They definitely react to anything I throw at them. If I need additional help or need to back off, they will adjust accordingly."

## **ProAct Employers of the Year/page three**

Individuals from ProAct have become part of the team, and Wenstrom has been very impressed with work performed by ProAct Site Supervisor Carmella Taylor, who serves as an intermediary between the ProAct workers she monitors and the company. Asset Marketing also utilizes a team of individuals from ProAct for cleaning services twice a week.

In the Supported Employment category, Chuck & Don's Pet Food Outlet has worked closely with its employee, Shannon Stone, who has received follow-up support from ProAct. Stone cleans the Eagan store, and has additional responsibilities that include working with rescue cats. Store Manager Jenny Griffin has shown a unique ability to see beyond Stone's limitations and to utilize her strengths in productive ways, said ProAct Program Coordinator Jennifer Markley.

Griffin said Chuck & Don's has grown more favorable to involving people with disabilities and helping to build up communities and people in general. "It's always been near and dear to my heart and I love working for a company that thinks this way," she said. "Working with Shannon is an absolute joy; she brings joy to the whole team." Griffin said she was "super excited" to receive the award for Chuck & Don's.

The fourth Employer Award winner, Peanut's Place in Eagan, fills a new "Vocational Partner" category. The animal boarding and grooming service hosts job candidates from ProAct who gain work experiences called assessments.

## **ProAct Employers of the Year/page four**

ProAct individuals are most often working when owner Roberta Venaglia is on duty. She said they free her up to do work in the front office and on other business duties.

“They’re spending the time with the dogs. It’s a good plus for everybody,” she said. Additionally, the flexibility to bring job candidates for assessments most anytime has made Peanut’s Place a valuable partner, explains ProAct Vocational Coordinator Heather Deutschlaender. “They have been very welcoming to us,” she said.

Staff members get along well with individuals from ProAct, Venaglia explained. One even got involved with the grooming part of the business. “Every supervisor that’s been here, we just love and the clients for the most part are super people.”

ProAct is headquartered in Eagan and has additional operations in Red Wing, Zumbrota and in Hudson, Wis. Its mission is to serve individuals experiencing barriers to employment and self-sufficiency due to intellectual and developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, mental health issues, traumatic brain injuries, and other challenges.

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