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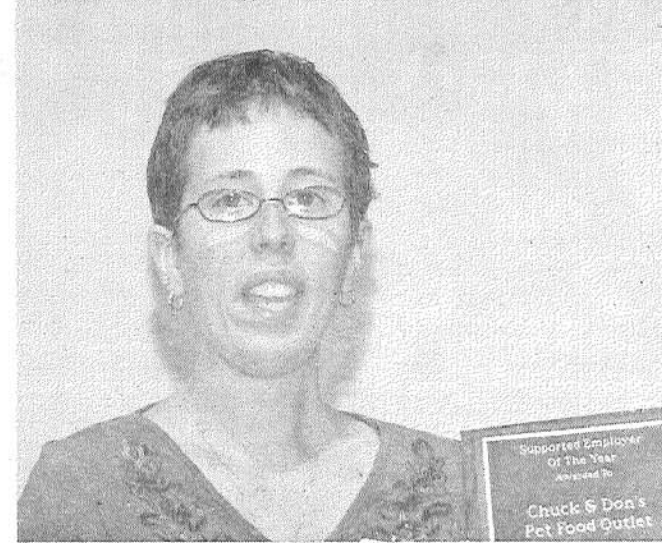
ProAct Awards celebrate providers of employment



Amy Wenstrom, left, inbound fulfillment manager for Asset Marketing in Burnsville, receives ProAct's Employer of the Year Award for Community Employment from ProAct Employment Manager Catherine McCoy



ProAct vocational specialist Jennifer Malm, left, presented the Employer Award for the Vocational Partner category to Sandie Heuer and Carol Jackson from Peanut's Place in Eagan.



Chuck & Don's Pet Food Outlet in Eagan was named for Employer of the Year for the Supported Employment category. The store employs ProAct's Shannon Stone, who received the award on behalf of the store.

Four diverse businesses were chosen for this year's ProAct Employer of the Year awards and honored at ProAct's 40th annual banquet in October. Honors going to Asset Marketing Services, Burnsville; IMV Technologies USA, Maple Grove; and two Eagan businesses, Chuck & Don's Pet Food Outlet and Peanut's Place. Winners were chosen in four employer categories.

The banquet was held at Prom Center in Oakdale and featured KSTP-TV News Anchor Megan Newquist. More than 500 people attended the event.

"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."

Winning recognition in the Business Partner category, IMV Technologies USA uses individuals from ProAct for packaging and labeling services, as well as quality assurance. The work involves people with a wide range of disabilities.

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 that is very enthusiastic about the work they do for their clients. We felt immediately that it was a good fit," he said.

Asset Marketing Services won the Community Marketing award. 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. 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.



IMV Technologies USA wins ProAct's Employer of the Year award for the Business Partner category. Pictured, from left, are: ProAct Sales Manager Greg Pechman, IMV Office Manager Eric Salonen and VP and General Manager Angela De Mirjyn, and Megan Newquist, news anchor for KSTP-TV

Photos courtesy of ProAct

"It's always been near and dear to my heart and I love working for a company that thinks this way," Griffin said. "Working with Shannon is an absolute joy; she brings joy to the whole team."

Peanut's Place fills a new "Vocational Partner" award category. The animal boarding and grooming service hosts job candidates from ProAct who gain work experience and get the chance to be assessed for work opportunities.

ProAct individuals are often working when owner Roberta Venaglia is on duty. They free her up to do work in the front office and on other 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 any-time has made Peanut's Place a valuable partner, said ProAct Vocational Coordinator Heather Deutschlaender.

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. ■