



## HOLIDAYS FOR FAMILY, MEMORIES

Time spent with those we love, away from the hustle and bustle of daily life, can be refreshing, bring renewal and improve our perspective. The holidays are a time such as this, and we at ProAct wish you the very best.

When we look back on the year that's slipping quickly from our calendars, we can know that our concern for others, our compassion and our plans can all be melded together in a harmony.



Some have experienced hard circumstances and difficulties this year. The comfort of a family member or close friend can mean so much in our times of need.

Our focus at ProAct has always been others-centered. We often ask: How do we provide the best services within the set boundaries we operate in?

Much of this comes down to what individuals, parents and other team members are requesting. Our desire is that all parties make an informed choice based on the facts and opportunities that are before them.

Chances are that some of these discussions about choices will happen at family gatherings over the holidays. Cares and concerns come into contact with life's plans, options and paths. Please know that we are here to help, listen and share ideas.

We wish you the best of the holidays, and a happy new year.

## Independent worker holds forum with former peers



Amy Ford, right, has worked independently at Target in Burnsville for two years. She shared her story with a ProAct crowd of 40, many of them former coworkers.

Speaking to a group of about 40, Target cashier Amy Ford said her doubts and fears of independent employment were real. The formerly center-based worker at ProAct in Eagan has been employed independently for two years.

ProAct individuals listened closely as Ford said that there were times when she wanted to give up on her job, but she kept on going.

"She followed the program the

way it was intended to be followed. She did accomplish something, and it does have value,"

said Designated Coordinator Deb Lyzenga. If one of her listeners is inspired, and says "Wow," that is a victory, she explained. The session also helped Ford to reinforce her accomplishments in her own mind.



## MANUFACTURER TAPS HUDSON MAN FOR ELECTRONICS SKILLS

Many have gifts on the mind over the holidays, both the giving and receiving, and Tyler Koeckeritz is using his gifts with two electronics companies in Hudson.

A tip from a friend led ProAct job developer Traci Kolo to Paul Saldin, president of Resolution Engineering, who invited the two over for a visit. The company works hand in hand with Resolution Products, producing components primarily for residential security systems.

Koeckeritz brought his portfolio along with samples of a number of the electronics projects he's worked on. From high end computer cooling fans to power supply modifications and measurements,



Above, junior technician Tyler Koeckeritz works with soldering guns and circuit boards under a microscope at Resolution Engineering in Hudson, Wis. Koeckeritz was hired by Resolution Engineering President Paul Saldin, who recognized his talents.

it was obvious that his passions were a match for Resolution.

Tyler has a lot of background doing his own research. He is very knowledgeable," Saldin said.

Together, Resolution and its employees lay claim to more than two dozen product patents, which are displayed in a conference room. "That's kind of our wall that shows our expertise and ability to



design innovative things," said Saldin.

Koeckeritz uses instruments and meters to rework items coming out of production. He'll also get involved in product testing and evaluation, Saldin explained. The man's work helps to free up engineers to perform other functions.

"It is awesome working here," said Koeckeritz, who keeps a journal of new ideas to share with Saldin.

The president said he likes the way the man's mind works. "I can tell that he thinks a lot about this stuff. He's very detailed. He makes drawings and notations about his ideas.

See Extraordinary job match, page 3

## ERECYCLING EVENT PULLS IN TONS OF MATERIAL

More than 90 vehicles carrying e-waste rolled into ProAct in Red Wing for the "Keep it Beautiful" electronics recycling collection event in the middle of a Friday in November.

"I think the community is very happy that they have an outlet to get rid of it and that most of it is free," said ProAct eRecycling Services Manager Tim Hovey. ProAct individuals received 10,500 pounds of material in the four-hour event that day and more than 30,000 pounds over a seven-day period, he said.

Cones lined ProAct's back lot and individuals directed traffic while people unloaded cars under brisk winds. The materials were sorted into large gaylord boxes surrounded by a canopy, where people organized their efforts.



ProAct eRecycling Services Manager Tim Hovey is interviewed by reporter Justin McKee with KTTC Television 10 at the "Keep America Beautiful" recycling collection in Red Wing.



The event was timed to coincide with "America Recycles Day," when special collections are held by nonprofits aligned with Virginia-based CyclePoint, which receives the sorted materials and sells them. ProAct is one of 40 CyclePoint members and the only member in the upper Midwest.

Watch video at [proactinc.org](http://proactinc.org)

See Recycling grows, page 2

## Inside: • CEO's column • Job shadowing bonanza • Talented eRecycling supervisor

## STRONG WORK ETHIC, SIMILAR JOBS REDUCE MEMORY ISSUES

Creating a work environment with simple accommodations for an employee is not unusual, but ProAct's close coordination with one individual is helping her to find new success with center-based work in Eagan.

Sue, who has a brain injury, had worked on a number of different jobs, but found the greatest success on the cereal and cereal bar line, where the tasks are very similar each day. Workers here sort boxes of product, prepping them for eventual shipment to grocery stores.

"She's gone from needing a lot of help to becoming a lot more independent at ProAct in terms of the job and that's been great to see," said Designated Coordinator Mark Gonnella.

She chooses center-based work over employment in the community. Sue better understands the layout of the building and where her job is, the coordinator said, but sometimes needs direction when returning from breaks or lunch.



Sue performs center-based work for ProAct in Eagan with more independence, thanks to a new approach.

Supervisor Becky Ulrick said Sue used to need more staff attention to help with memory issues and learning different jobs.

"Because she's doing this day after day, she's doing well," said Ulrick. "That's what she needs, the same thing every day."

Gonnella said the work routine has also reduced the need for promptings from supervisors. He said her attitude is, "I'm here to work. Let me work."

"You name it, I've had so many jobs in my life," said Sue. "You name it, I can do it."

There are times when she provides instruction to coworkers to let them know what needs to be done, Gonnella explains.

A jovial person, Sue jokes about supervisors cracking the whip and staying busy. "She's got the best personality," Ulrick said.

## From the President...

As the year winds down I find myself reflecting on a very eventful year for the support system that provides services for people with disabilities in Minnesota. It is a support system that is operating in a time of significant change and transition, maybe even transformation, depending on your perspective.

It is natural for services to evolve over time. During periods of more significant change, I don't feel it is unusual or incomplete for very biased perspectives to surface, even misinformation and unbalanced views shared. I feel there is some validity to all viewpoints, at least from the perspective of the issuer.

No program or service is perfect, and can benefit from continuous improvement. For ProAct, it is important that we stay focused on how to best serve the individuals that have chosen us as a service provider and to help them achieve the objectives of their person-centered plan. We must continuously improve the services we provide.

I believe embedding a person-centered philosophy, including a sound informed choice process throughout our organization, will result in better outcomes

for the individuals we serve. We have always focused on individualized services, but I think what I am referring to takes it to a different level.

We certainly want to continue to emphasize community based employment, and community integration activity, but I think we can make improvements in our services that result in integrated competitive employment. Our unique "Way-to-Work" pilot project with Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Dakota County is one way to achieve more of those outcomes.

We remain committed to supporting choice for the people we serve and in order to have true choice, you need to have options to choose from. We want to continue to offer a broad array of service options so that individuals can tailor their choices to meet their needs.

Best wishes for a holiday season filled with joy and happiness.




## INFORMED CHOICE VISITS SEEK OPTIONS

Workers at Red Wing Stoneware need to be detail oriented and aggressive, but not too aggressive, employee Sandy Bethea explained to a group of six individuals from ProAct.

They were on a tour of the revived pottery facility, one of many experiences to expand work options for people with disabilities. It's all part of an "Informed Choice" effort. Vocational specialist Sam Kapala said he hopes people take an interest in the process.

He encourages individuals to ask original questions about the work environment and expectations. Bethea told visitors that her work is fun, and isn't the same every day. From the creation of the pottery, to the drying, decorating and kiln firing, a lot is happening. The hope is that ProAct individuals take an interest, and even apply for a job.

For those who shy away from fancy pots, there were multiple grocery store shadow experiences, a visit to a winery, newspaper, manufacturing companies, a restaurant and a drugstore.



Individuals learn from Red Wing Stoneware's Sandy Bethea during a comprehensive "job shadow" tour of the pottery making operation. Others from ProAct work here.

"Our ultimate goal would be to see a number of our individuals go further by applying for jobs with better knowledge of work expectations," said Designated Coordinator Rachel NaSal, a key planner for the multiple experiences. Responses have

been good, and requests have come in for more workplace exposures. People are learning more. "Individuals have had the opportunity to ask questions about the businesses as well as what they require of their employees," said NaSal.



## NEW SKILLS SERVED HERE, CUSTARD TOO

New restaurant crews are getting "Culverized" on weekdays, as paid, uniformed workers at Culver's in Eagan.

The opportunities to interact with diners, both inside and at their cars, are continuous, and Site Supervisor Kam McPhillips has witnessed the impact on her crewmembers.

Some are like different people, and have made positive transformations into community employment, managers explained.

Everyone is doing a great job, said General Manager Marvin Martinez. "Some are helping us scoop custard. They're very helpful."

Individuals from ProAct dispense, offer and serve custard samples in the dining room. Cleaning and stocking are on their duty roster, as well.

McPhillips supports the individuals on site. Work hours are just before, through and after lunchtime.



Kelsie Robotka, above, delivers tasty food and a smile to a drive through customer.



Above, Jordan Barknecht does the same in the dining room, and stands ready with Jessie Kulaszewicz as diners and their orders roll in. The workers keep up with the demand.



### Doggie Getaway, from page 4

"I like it a lot," said ProAct's Ashley Peterson, who has five dogs at her house and looks forward to playing with the canines. She said she would enjoy working in a pet facility and easily takes on added tasks during her three hours at the shelter. Another ProAct individual, Emily Gage, has a dog of her own and looks forward to this weekly experience with anticipation.

Hobbie said the volunteer outings have brought positive changes in ProAct people on the crews. "Over the past month, they have taken on two hours of assigned tasks with little direction," she said. "They have both learned the responsibilities that come with an independent job." The



Ashley Peterson, at left, and Emily Gage above.

supervisor said the crew members' experience here increases the

possibility of obtaining a job in animal care. Each has learned the basic responsibilities in an environment where lots of animals want their attention and care.

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## Stay in touch with us

### Admission Information

Eagan, Hudson-  
Sue Lowe 651-289-3151  
Red Wing, Zumbrota-  
Pamela Veith 651-327-5613

### Need Employees?

Eagan- Greg Pechman  
651-289-3157 (groups)  
Eagan-  
Heather Deutschlaender  
651-289-3163 (individuals)

Hudson- Traci Kolo  
715-245-6877  
Red Wing- Kyle Adams  
651-327-5622

Red Wing- Kyle Adams 651-327-5622

Donation Opportunities  
Sheena Henry 651-289-3149

### Production Services

Eagan- Greg Pechman 651-289-3157

### See Recycling grows, page 2

An additional event is being planned for the spring.

"Everything we collect represents more hours we can work," said Hovey, whose operation has grown to 11 part-time and three full-time jobs. Materials are received five days a week and pickup service is offered to businesses with large amounts of electronics for disposal.

See proactinc.org for a video production from the event. Most items are received for free, but a price list is available on ProAct's website for devices that incur a charge, mainly tube TVs, CRT screens and large appliances. Call 651-388-7108 for information.



### ProAct Board of Directors:

John Christiansen, Chuck DeNet, Paul Kramp, Mary Ellen Leary, Larry Lehman, Jim Louwagie, Teri McCloughan, Marty Stapleton and Jon Wilbrecht.

### ERECYCLING SUPERVISOR BRINGS EXPERIENCE

Terri Biles split 30 years between San Diego and Alaska before returning to the Maiden Rock area in western Wisconsin.

A few years later, ProAct supervisor Chris Hartley met her at the landfill in Pepin County, Wis., where she worked.

“Chris found me at the dump,” said Biles, with a chuckle. Hartley brought his recycling there, and Biles became the cashier. “The dump Nazi is what they call me over there, and I enforced a standard higher than the previous people did.” The outdoor conditions got cold, and with no scale, pricing for loads was often negotiated. Education was part of it, too, and helping senior citizens, she said.

Biles started a “free” store there, and took requests and donations from patrons who would come and go. Amazingly, people’s requests would often show up within 24 hours and Biles would call to let them know they were in. From rocking chairs to cedar chests, all kinds of items were one man’s junk and another’s treasure. The facility even received electronics until the place where they sent them stopped receiving them.

Biles left the county and agreed to join ProAct part-time. She assists up to a dozen individuals with electronics tear-down and sorting and processes. She reminds them



Terri Biles worked at an area landfill before coming to ProAct part-time, and brings a very wide range of experiences.

about safety gloves and glasses, and applies Band-Aids. There’s almost always something unusual that rolls in between microwaves and computers, cash registers and copiers.

“A lot of people are interested in destroying things. I even gave a guy a title, ‘The Doctor of Destruction,’” she said.

Biles attended the University of Alaska in Anchorage and holds a degree in criminal justice with a specialty in rehabilitation. From cans and bottles to

cardboard, and now electronics, Biles said she’s set up recycling systems at many workplaces.

Her hope for the future is to see ProAct eRecycling Services succeed, paying good wages and taking care of the materials correctly. Making the process efficient and gathering the items is the goal.

She said the individuals who are doing the work have a great deal of fun and do not get bored. People are more than willing to help. “The people are great,” she said, noting that more want to be on her crew.



Biles works closely with individuals on the eRecycling line.

### Production adds group sites to services

Sales Manager Greg Pechman has been bringing jobs into ProAct’s headquarters for years, and now he is adding estimates for enclave group employment sites to his responsibilities.

Enclave work sites require a “trifecta,” said Pechman, comprised of available workers, transportation and supervisors. Price quotes were previously done by another department.

There’s a misconception out there with some prospective customers that jobs are less expensive when done by ProAct individuals who are center-based. To the contrary, the

manager said, center-based work often costs more because ProAct’s overhead expenses are figured in. Pechman said the true cost is essentially the same whether a company hosts

a crew and covers its own overhead expenses, or pays for ProAct’s overhead with center-based work.

Additionally, since some enclave jobs are quoted on a per piece rate, some expect that contracting with ProAct for labor should be less expensive than doing it in house. “Labor is labor,” he said, noting whether people have disabilities or not, labor costs are the same to complete the job. “What we offer is firepower,” Pechman said. “With hundreds of workers, large jobs become manageable.”



### PROACT BRIEFS:

#### Eagan Rotary gives \$2k

The Eagan Rotary Club named ProAct as one of 26 organizations for grant funds supporting community causes.

A check for \$2,000 will help fund a bus replacement. “We truly appreciate the Rotarians for giving us this opportunity to get people to and from home, work and community activities,” said Catherine McCoy, ProAct community relations manager.

The club’s motto, “Be a gift to the world,” was highlighted at the luncheon event as \$30,000 in grant funds were distributed.



Catherine McCoy receives a \$2,000 grant for ProAct from Eagan Rotary’s Steve Haschig.

#### ADS creativity on display

Video productions created by the Adult Day Services classroom in Eagan bring a news and entertainment bent to viewers, complete with commercials produced for break times.



The thrill for staff was strong participation from people with all ability levels, explains direct service professional Alejandra Castellanos. Scripts allowed individuals with memory issues to participate, and those who were nonverbal found other ways to express themselves.



The productions took on several formats, including a late night talk show, news program, soft drink advertisement and a promotion for a heating and cooling company. The programs were recorded and produced on iPad devices, and are available for viewing using a password on proactinc.org. Contact dcowles@proactinc.org for more information- 651-686-0405.

#### ADS Thanksgiving feast



Adult Day Services staff members outdid themselves again by cooking another Thanksgiving feast complete with ham, turkey, broccoli soufflé, mashed potatoes, gravy, rolls and many pies.

ProAct individuals in ADS ate for free and staff are asked to contribute \$5 for the scrumptious meal. The funds are used to defray the cost of food.

#### Diabetes dog demo engages



Even the best blood sugar measurement technology can’t match the speed of a diabetes companion dog that’s trained to pick up the scent.

So says the diabetic alert dog trainers Diane Marquette and Ann Wallen. The duo gave a live demonstration to ProAct participants, staff and guests in Eagan. The dogs tap their owners with a paw if they

sense the blood sugar is outside the acceptable range.

“They can pick up scents that humans are not able to detect. That’s why they’re so amazing,” said ProAct’s Connie Erickson. It was her dream to host an event like this, explains Designated Coordinator Charlotte Eastin. “The whole team worked to make it happen, with individuals even baking diabetic treats.” Erickson introduced the speakers and helped organize the event. Learn more at scentangels.com.

#### New art products available

From Santa Clauses and snowmen craft creations made by individuals at ProAct in Red Wing are now available for sale. Three sizes range in cost from \$5 to \$8. The painted designs are elaborate and eye-catching.



#### ‘Heroes’ plays written, performed by ProAct

ProAct Playhouse presented superhero performances with enthusiasm at Easter Lutheran Church in Eagan.

“Heroes” was a collection of four original short plays revolving around the theme of what it means to be a hero, explained Designated Coordinator Matt Brigs, the class director. Class members portrayed heroes of all shapes, sizes and abilities, and created the ideas as well, he said.

“The actors and actresses in this play have worked hard all semester,” said Tricia Gantt, a ProAct designated coordinator.

The short plays included “Know Thy Strength,” a story about revenge and the true meaning of a word strong. “Rolling Justice and the Golden Disc” followed two down-on-their-luck super heroes who use wheelchairs and then get a chance to make their big break. In “The Magic Touch,” two sisters who are quite different have their relationship put to the test when one receives a strange magical power. “A Little Light” follows Jasper, a man on a mission to be the greatest super-villain, until one very happy boy appears.



#### Board perspective, from page 4

point where it’s not obvious why financial performance is good or bad in a particular month, Wilbrecht explains. He comes in to help create management systems that spell out issues, define trends and provide tools to better understand what’s happening with the business.

Since ProAct is a nonprofit service enterprise, maintaining a motivated and high functioning staff is critical to the mission, Wilbrecht said. Improving and expanding programs for individuals while maintaining sound fiscal discipline is a challenging, but rewarding activity, he explained.

The board member said his business experience has made him more pragmatic. Working effectively for 18 years in

partnership with a Japanese company required an understanding of the basis for different perspectives. “The secret of working well together is that you have to develop the skill of listening,” he said.

Wilbrecht had praise for the sound financial management of ProAct President Steve Ditschler. He said ProAct is as prepared as any group in the state to deal with future regulatory changes. “However, the Olmstead decision will force our industry to modify its business model in the coming two years.” The challenge is in estimating the future viability of each existing program and in developing new programs to make ProAct even better going forward.

#### Extraordinary job match, from page 1

The practical aspect of the business involves a lot of testing to assure that installers and dealers have working products at the job sites. Coming up with new designs is also important.

“He understands all the concepts,” said Kolo. “You don’t have to explain anything to him. He tries to explain it to me, and I’m like, ‘Tyler, seriously, not a clue.’”

Sitting in a technology operating room of sorts, Koeckeritz has inductors, capacitors, spools of wire and high end soldering irons within his reach. Some parts

are so small tweezers are used to move and place them.

Koeckeritz said he learns a lot from books and online, expanding his knowledge as he goes. A common theme is to take an existing product and make it better by customization.

The Hudson job match has left Kolo thrilled, and it verified her earlier advice to Koeckeritz to wait for the right opportunity. The two didn’t go far, as the components business is next door to ProAct’s Hudson facility. On weekday mornings, Koeckeritz is there.



## WILBRECHT NEARS FIVE YEARS ON BOARD

He came to ProAct in 2011 from an engineering world of satellite and space probe components, but despite the complexities of manufacturing, government agencies, and different cultures, board member Jon Wilbrecht had things to learn about ProAct's environment.

In business, a service or product is often independently provided and the provider then waits to see how it's accepted, he explains. "In ProAct's environment, the services you provide are controlled by whoever is making the rules and doing the funding." A key requirement for ProAct's success is to build on its strengths and still live within the guidelines that funders have given. Wilbrecht said he's been impressed by how the organization functions so successfully while operating under a regulatory microscope.

The board member is now a consultant, but formerly owned a

manufacturing firm, Wilbrecht Electronics. It made a variety of aerospace components, including some used on the Cassini space probe now orbiting the planet Saturn. That craft had a seven-year journey, followed by a dozen years of exploration, so its components had to be designed to operate reliably and continuously over a very extended time.



Jon Wilbrecht

This kind of component reliability was the foundation for Wilbrecht's company, he said. "GOES" weather satellites, for example, each carry 4,400 Wilbrecht Electronics parts, and each performs a critical and unrepairable

function. Ejection seats, aircraft defense systems, and complex test equipment also rely on the company's products.

After he sold his company, Wilbrecht dove into coaching and consulting roles with industry executives, and he brings that perspective to ProAct's board, as well. Smaller companies often grow to a

See Board perspective, page 3

## Now at ProAct

### Way to Work

- ★ Do you want to work independently in the community?  Yes  No
- ★ Do you work in-center or at a group site?  Yes  No
- ★ Are you living in Dakota County?  Yes  No

If you answered yes to these questions and attend ProAct, contact a ProAct Designated Coordinator in Eagan to complete a Way to Work Interest Form. It's available on the ProAct website.

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors are partnering with ProAct for a pilot program called Way to Work. It is designed to assist individuals who want to transition from center-based work settings into competitive community jobs. VRS Counselors work directly from ProAct West to assess and plan with each individual using a person-centered approach to identify interest areas for work. Benefits options and support needs are also addressed before beginning placement activities. Pictured are VRS Counselors Kaelene Klemick, left, and Margie Webb.



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Comments welcome, alternative formats available— Upon request, this publication is available in alternate languages and formats. Comments are welcome. Contact Sheena Henry at 651-289-3149, shenry@proactinc.org.

## CANINE CRUSADERS PITCH IN WITH CARE

With many requests from individuals for animal care activities, ProAct direct service professional Sarah Hobbie approached a pet boarding and training facility she uses, Doggie Day Getaway (DDG) in Apple Valley.

Co-owner Nicole Boe has welcomed Hobbie and her group of volunteers every week for a month, and has been pleased with their contribution. She typically brings three people from ProAct to assist in setting up the rooms for the dogs. They also clean and provide attention to groups of senior dogs needing special help.

"It is good for the dogs to get the special attention," said Boe.

In operation since 2004, Doggie Day Getaway has grown to include a staff of 23 who care for 70 to 80 dogs a day, on average. On a busy holiday, that number can jump to 120.



Doggie Day Getaway in Apple Valley hosts volunteers from ProAct each week to help care for dogs. It's a popular volunteer spot, as many ProAct individuals request experiences like these. Clockwise from the back are Sarah Hobbie, Nicole Boe, Ashley Peterson and Emily Gage.

See Doggie Getaway, page 2

## Individuals meet kids, help at RW school

Being in the community and being a part of it are central to ProAct's mission, and one school's need turned into an opportunity for individuals in Red Wing to meet new people and provide a needed service.

Tucked in between bluffs, Sunnyside Elementary school put a request out for volunteers to help at lunchtime, and ProAct individuals come twice each week. The school of about 450 is mostly kindergarten and first-graders, with two second grade classes.

"It's the feeling of 'I get to do stuff,'" said ProAct direct service professional Teri Birdsall. There's social interaction and relationships with the children that wouldn't happen outside of the school, she explains.

The idea came out of a brainstorming session with Principal Jeremy Sorenson and his staff, which led to an online advertisement and a response from ProAct. "I can see that they enjoy being here," he said. He often greets the volunteers and



Heather Baume, left, clears children's food trays with supervisor Teri Birdsall. Below, Angela Redwing offers a near-continuous smile as she cleans school floors.



said it's good for children to meet different kinds of people. "There are some good interactions there. It's a win, win."

When Birdsall mentions Sunnyside at ProAct, people get excited, she said, and are happy to come. One volunteer, Angela Redwing, sweeps and smiles as the children exit the lunchroom. "I like being around the kids," she said. "And, I enjoy the helping aspect of it."

The principal said he hopes the first year program will continue in the fall of 2016.