

PROACT PEOPLE ACHIEVING

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Reflecting on holiday goodness

Why for so many of us are the holidays some of the best times? Is it because we are reunited with family and friends? Is it our generosity and greater consideration for others? Is it by cause of us purposing within ourselves to be joyful, and to truly enjoy one another's company?



For those of us who have lost loved ones, it can be a time of sadness mixed with sweet memories. But one theme seems to shine through all of these elements, and that is that relationships matter. To know that someone cares, and to care ourselves, is at the core of our humanity. Our focus on individuals at ProAct is very much in this same spirit. We want to enhance each person's quality of life.

Ever more so, our society is one filled with distractions and things with which to fill our time. Could it be that the pause of the holidays place on us a needed respite— a chance to refocus and reprioritize our lives around those we love and care for? Could this be the start of a New Year's resolution with deeper meaning and profound implications?

We wish you the best over this season, and look forward with hope to 2020. Much of the next year will be what we make of it.



Video: they tell why ProAct is so good



Staff and one family share their reasons why ProAct in Shakopee is an engaging and beneficial place to be each day. Staff enjoy fulfilling careers and participants connect well. "I can't think of another job that I could do where I could have that type of satisfaction," said direct service professional Tom Fix.

Watch it on



High end skate pro makes good fits

At the other end of the long block that runs to ProAct in Red Wing is a nearly 75-year-old hand-crafter of high-end sports equipment. After connecting with the nonprofit, the friendly people at Riedell Skates found a reliable production worker in Audrey Bakos, and ProAct supports her with twice a month visits.



Audrey Bakos, center, found a fine job match at Riedell Skates in Red Wing. She's with Finishing Supervisor, Brenda Gold, left, and her trainer and coworker, Vicki Riegelman, whose husband, Paul, is the grandson of the company's founder. Paul Riedell started the company with his wife, Sophie, in 1945.

She checks tacks and does finishing work for ice skates and traditional roller skates, the ones with four wheels, five days a week. With a staff of 90, the company has a legacy of "supplying the world's best skates with exceptional fit and comfort." An upper-end boot with a blade on it can sell for as much as \$1,000. Others can be \$700 for the boot alone and \$300 for roller skates.

Bakos has 40 years of production experience at Red Wing Shoe. She came to ProAct a couple of years ago and formed new friendships. In fact, one of the hardest parts of her new job was being away from coworkers and staff at ProAct.

"She struggled a lot with missing a lot of her friends from here," said direct service professional Steve Whitmore, who tracks her progress. The employment pro suggested that she see her ProAct friends on weekends, and through community ed. Bakos gets off at noon on Fridays, and visits ProAct before people head home for the day.

Buffing out and cleaning the shoes and boots, she employs a variety of tools that include a railroad spike sized punch to make sure the tacks inside are nailed down. The footwear is made and checked by hand. There can be 20 to 25 different styles going through her area at a time.

"She's been a real asset," said Finishing Supervisor Brenda Gold. "And has stepped up to the plate."

Gold gave some needed encouragement early on to build Bakos up. She's closing in on a year with the company and is thriving. "I am proud of what I do," she said.

Director of Manufacturing Chris Zylka said some Riedell Skates are worn by Olympians. "A lot of people don't realize what we do here."



From the President...

At ProAct, our desire is to be flexible and innovative as we respond to the needs and desires of our participants and their teams. Not every new idea makes it into the final product or program, but the point is that we are actively trying new things and sometimes stepping outside of traditions and norms. I think that will continue to be necessary when focusing on person-centered service delivery.



You may be aware that the number of people on the autism spectrum and with related communication disorders has been increasing. We too have found this to be true. Parents and guardians often ask us what we can do to enhance our services for this population of participants.

Multiple approaches provide a greater opportunity for success, but a new one in the works is ProAct's Autism Center. We raised some dollars for this project through the "Give to the Max" campaign. You also may have seen a holiday email from me with a request for support. The concept is to have a calming environment for people to go to when the stressors of the day become too much. And, our staff receive more specialized training. Our board is committed to the project.

I want to share my apologies for the first rain-out of our Golf Classic in my memory. The gourmet dinner was moved up and people retreated from the weather for some good fun inside. People were very understanding, cheerful and willing to support us. And for that, I am very grateful.

I'm pleased to report that ProAct continues to be in a very stable position. Much of our funding and ability to provide service depends on decisions made at the state Legislature. That process picks up again with the new session in February, and we will connect with our elected officials as necessary.

I wish everyone the best over the holidays and look forward to greater things in 2020. Not long ago, that year seemed so far away. When we are all busy using our talents to help others, we can feel satisfied and fulfilled. Our work isn't always easy, but delivering desired outcomes for our participants is worth it.

Admission Information

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ProAct's Six Locations

- 3195 Neil Armstrong Blvd. Eagan, MN 55121
- (West) 3225 Neil Armstrong Blvd. Eagan, MN 55121
- 204 Mississippi Ave. Red Wing, MN 55066
- New Options - ProAct 792 Canterbury Rd., #132 Shakopee, MN 55379
- 1202 Beaudry Blvd. Hudson, WI 54016
- 224 S. Main St. Zumbrota, MN 55992



ProAct is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities.

Red Wing matures on road to 50 years

ProAct in Red Wing, then Interstate Rehabilitation Center, hit another growth spurt after it's first move in the early 1970s. It purchased a 40,000 square-foot structure on the city's west end in July 1975.

By 1978, IRC had four distinct work areas: packaging and assembly, a leather shop, wood shop and upholstery. A third of its participants were engaged in recreational activities, which included softball, frisbee, horseshoes, basketball, bowling, bingo and library visits. Full-time staffers now numbered 20, and there were 80 overall participants.



Restaurant booth work for Perkins.

As 1980 began, tragedy struck in March when Executive Director Roger Stensland died unexpectedly at the age of 42. He had led efforts to build an addition that would house the Goodhue County DAC. It became a separate nonprofit service. By the summer, a

modern office area and loading dock were added. IRC helped develop a new community education program and received a two-year certification from Minnesota Voc Rehab. In September, David Leiseth was named executive director, and would serve until the merger with Eagan's Owobopte in 2002.

In 1981, IRC was serving more than 100 participants. Much more contract work came from outside Red Wing and group homes were emerging as a housing option. The following year, IRC began preparations for national accreditation by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). As 1984 rolled in, a substantial remodeling and expansion brought accessible bathrooms, improved heating, a tiled lunchroom and an enclosed woodworking department. A supported employment program also began with two grants. The annual budget reached \$1 million for the first time.

Mobile work crews started in 1988 with janitorial services. And, IRC served its first Wisconsin residents, 18 of them, in 1990. Westward expansion and a new Day Training & Habilitation license came to Zumbrota in 1991, and the name ProAct was first used in 1994 for a new IRC location in downtown Zumbrota serving 13 people. The nonprofit had grown to serve 210 individuals overall.

From the mid-1990s to early 2000s more services were added in production and work crews (group employment) increased. So did self-advocacy and assistive technology. Day training and support services were expanded to serve 100 people.

IRC's name and organization changed in 2002 when it merged with Eagan-based Owobopte. The larger ProAct era had begun. ProAct in Red Wing and Zumbrota would serve 283 individuals in the next fiscal year, with 141 in Extended Employment and 124 in day training. Steve Ditschler was the president and CEO and continues in that capacity today.



IRC, circa 1990s.

"Change in many forms is our constant challenge as we continue to provide person-centered, positive and exciting service offerings to individuals with disabilities," said Director Sally Ogren. In its 50 years, ProAct in Red Wing has helped thousands of individuals to live better lives by improving their skills, connecting them to their community and increasing their dignity through work opportunities, she explained.

Kind, capable staff, outings prompt gift

At year's end, some check their list of contacts to thank them for being a wonderful part of their lives. They are grateful for the service or cause of an organization, and give a donation.

This fall, Steven and Lisa Kiwus thanked ProAct for caring for their daughter, Chloe. Even with long trips from Minnetonka to Eagan, they said it was worth it for the quality of care they found.

They wrote:

"ProAct has an AMAZING staff of kind, compassionate and capable people. I really cannot express how much we appreciate this program. Chloe is nonverbal and has a high level of needs, which at times can be a challenge. The staff has always treated her with respect and

worked with us to get her needs met. Since independent work is not possible for Chloe, she enjoys the fact that she gets out in the community the three days she attends. It means the world to us. At almost all of the other

programs she would be sitting in a room all day long."

The couple said they know that ProAct's team is aware of Chloe's needs. At ProAct, they

said she is a person who matters.

ProAct's person-centered focus has been a foundation for many years. This practice is expressed through numerous class choices, field trips and employment tryouts.



Direct service professional Whitney Boucha provides one-to-one care for Chloe Kiwus.

Holiday Lights Recycling collection spots

ProAct is offering 26 drop-off locations to recycle holiday lights through the first week of February. Program Manager Jennifer Cavalier said there are a few exclusions. Not accepted are cord adapters, battery packs, plastic rope lights, CFL lights, light fixtures, trees and garland. There are collection locations across Dakota County, in Red Wing, Shakopee and Savage. For a full list and more information, please see proactinc.org.



Upcoming Events

Details at proactinc.org and on Facebook

Valentine's Day Sale - ProAct in Shakopee— Show your support at the annual Valentine's Day sale on Friday, February 14 from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Scott County Government Center. Presale is February 13. Candy bouquets can be pre-ordered by contacting Ali at abrown@proactinc.org, 952-403-7964.

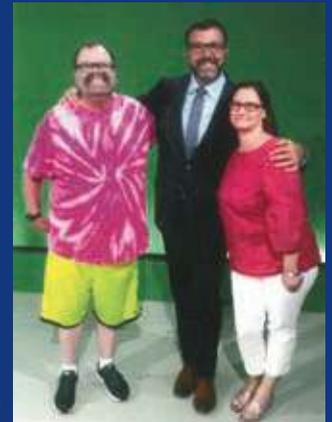
"Under the ProAct Big Top - A Circus Spectacular"— ProAct Playhouse performance— Lakeville Area Arts Center, 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 28, 2020.

ProAct briefs:

His FOX 9 talk show thrill

"It was one day I'll never forget in my life," said ProAct participant Bill Spencer in Eagan, after attending "The Jason Show," with FOX 9's Jason Matheson.

Spencer sat in the front row with his personal care assistant, Jackie Spande, and was invited back stage for a meet and greet. "He said we look like twins and I gave him a bear hug," said Spencer, who left with tears of happiness in his eyes. He later shared the experience with many at ProAct.



Board vet, past longtime member honored

A current and a past veteran of ProAct's Board of Directors were recognized with engraved awards recently denoting more than 20 years of service to the nonprofit.

Board member Paul Kramp was a carryover from the Interstate Rehabilitation Center board in Red Wing. IRC merged with Owobopte in Eagan in 2002 and became ProAct.

He served as the first chairman of a newly formed ProAct board, and was a key player in setting up and making the transition. "The results show that it was the right decision, to upgrade all of our facilities and obtain a better working environment for all of our clients," said Kramp. "It gave them opportunities they probably wouldn't have had if they had stayed separate." Kramp is president of Alliance Bank in Red Wing.

Also recognized for more than 20 years of service was Larry Lehman, who retired from the ProAct Board in 2017.



Paul Kramp has served on the board for 22 years.

Five decades later, still connected to 'the Shoe'

Red Wing Shoe Company has supported ProAct in that city from day one, and continues to connect by sending gift pack materials to be assembled.

Five different shoe and boot care styles are made, some with folded towels, and are sold at Red Wing Shoe stores across the U.S., explains Dee Bigelbach in sales.



ProAct's Linda Gorenson works in assembly and quality control, handling boxes, labels, products and inserts for Red Wing Shoe branded care kits.



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Catch up on ProAct's recognition events- proactinc.org

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Autism training strengthens services

The Competing Behavior Pathway Model, Applied Behavior Analysis and characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) were a few of the elements of recent autism training sessions attended by about 100 ProAct staff members. ProAct is partnering with the Autism Society of Minnesota to increase its knowledge base and provide better services. Additional staff will be trained soon.



Sign up by texting
ProAct to: 22828



Read about Matt Weisz and his success in Red Wing, learn about ProAct's Business Partner Network, view photos from Red Wing's 50th Anniversary event and more in the ProAct Post, a publication delivered by email.

'You Betcha Box' distinctly Minnesota



ProAct participants and staff package multiple gift box varieties for a growing effort that blends local culture with high quality Minnesota products. At center is Katie Sterns, CEO of Share Local Love.

The novelty of what is Minnesota, packaged up in gift boxes with the flavors and feel of the North Star State— it's called You Betcha Box, and ProAct is packaging them by the thousands.

"I'm excited to be working with ProAct," said Katie Sterns, CEO and founder of Share Local Love, the company behind effort.

"The goal is to do as much good locally as we can with everybody."

There's a fair amount of complexity to the business, with 50 different "small makers," all

over Minnesota. Individualized kits are assembled, offered at shows and stores and shipped via online orders.

About 10 varieties are offered, from "MinnDulgent" treats to "Ultimate Foodie 'Sota," "Meat Raffle," "Craft Beer" and "Tea Time" box themes.

Sterns often sports a "buffalo check" plaid outfit much like the current governor did on the campaign trail.

The founder and her boxes have been featured in Twin Cities media. "It's a Minnesota experience in a box, and you open it to get the fun," said Sterns. Learn more at youbetchabox.com



Jena Groth