

Achiever

Building skills, careers and independence

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New CEO - Tom Weaver looks to expand opportunities for people with disabilities

Tom Weaver, Achieve's new CEO, may have an impressive and extensive resume, but his roots remain deeply embedded in Anoka County soil. Weaver grew up in Anoka County and now finds himself back "home" as CEO of Achieve.

Prior to this, Weaver, who is an attorney, served for eight years as regional administrator at the Metropolitan Council where he oversaw 3,600 employees and an annual budget of \$750 million – an organization that was substantially larger than Achieve.

For Weaver, the switch made perfect sense. "At this point in my career, I felt the need for a more 'meaningful' experience," he said. "And Achieve's mission captivated me."

It is a mission that hits close to home – in more ways than one. Weaver's experience serving people with disabilities is not only professional, it's personal as well. "I am the guardian of a younger sister with a traumatic brain injury, and I am the godfather of an 18-year-old nephew with Down syndrome," he said.

Weaver sees Achieve as having a number of key strengths. "When I first visited the Achieve program I noticed the incredibly positive environment," he said. "Participants and staff are very upbeat. I also noted the dedication and professionalism of staff members. Everyone is willing to do whatever needs doing in order to advance Achieve's mission and the well-being of our participants. They are a committed group and their longevity on the job speaks to this.

"Finally, our reputation for innovative and individualized programming sets us apart and lets the commu-



nity and consumers know we can meet their specific needs," he said.

Weaver comes to Achieve with a number of goals for the program. "In the short-term I'd like to see us create a more business-like atmosphere, increase overall fiscal discipline and complete a new strategic plan for the organization," he said.

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Newsletter of



Volume 22, Number 2
Fall 2011

Change is in the wind

Message from Tom Weaver, Achieve CEO

As Minnesotans, the one thing we know for sure about the weather is that it's always about to change. Change is in the wind for Achieve Services as well. Throughout our 47-year history, we've dealt with and adapted to change on various levels. The program began as a daytime activity center for children with disabilities and later evolved into a program for adults. Along the way we went from being a county-run program to a free-standing non-profit. As we look to the future, however, it is clear that we'll have to be more proactive in anticipating change, and much more nimble in adapting to it.

To that end, our Board of Directors and senior staff have been engaged in a Strategic Planning process over the past few months. That process involves reexamining our mission, vision and values in light of the challenges we face today and the challenges we expect to face over the next several years. The new strategic plan will essentially outline the next chapter in the story of Achieve.

So what, specifically, is likely to change, and what will remain constant? Well, we generally agree that our mission still rings true:

By creating innovative opportunities that inspire people with disabilities, Achieve will enable every participant to lead a meaningful and self-determined life.

As we pursue our mission, we need to ensure that our programs and services are sustainable over the long term. In other words, our programs and services must be focused and operated efficiently to ensure that our costs do not exceed our revenues.

Revenues, we know, are changing. Historically we have received the vast majority of our revenues from government sources, mostly in the form of medical assistance payments. Last session, the legislature cut medical assistance for our services. While the cut was relatively modest, we expect the ongoing pressures on government budgets will yield additional cuts down the road.

Moreover, we know that our rate structure will be modified beginning in 2013. While we currently receive the same basic rate for each participant, the new rates will be more closely tied to the actual needs of each participant. While the new structure certainly makes sense in theory, we don't yet know how it will affect our revenue stream.



With that in mind, the draft of our new strategic plan emphasizes the need to diversify our revenue sources, primarily by enhancing our employment and business opportunities. This could include either contracting with or hiring a "business development director." The BDD would be responsible for developing two or three new participant-staffed small businesses, and could also enhance our community-based employment and on-site production programs.

The new strategic plan also calls for expanding our board of directors, developing a "pipeline" between the school districts and Achieve, more collaboration with other providers and enhancing our network with employers – among other things. Achieve's Board of Directors will take formal action on the plan at its Annual Meeting in November.

Achieve is entering a new season. We will work to meet our new challenges in ways that create opportunities and growth for the people we serve. We will continue in our mission to inspire and enable each participant to lead a meaningful and self-determined life.

There's no denying that the wind is picking up and the weather is shifting; the air around us is charged with energy. Change is on the horizon. We strive to meet it head on.



Sandy Crawford and John LeTourneau join Achieve's Board of Directors

Like all non-profit organizations, Achieve operates under the direction of a board of directors.

"We place a high priority on having a strong board of directors," said Achieve CEO, Tom Weaver. "Their leadership provides support and guidance to all aspects of our organization. Each board members brings specific skills and knowledge to the group and our two newest members are no exception."

Weaver is referring to Sandy Crawford and John LeTourneau, both of whom joined Achieve's board in the last months.

Crawford and LeTourneau each have sons who are participants at Achieve. Their first-hand knowledge of disability issues from a

parent's perspective is only one of the valuable aspects they will contribute to Achieve's board.

Sandy Crawford is a certified public accountant and employed as executive vice president of Mead Metals, Inc. in Shoreview. "I had been looking for an opportunity to work with a non-profit where I could use my practical business background and gain personal satisfaction from knowing I was making a difference," she said.

Crawford brings great financial expertise to the board. In addition to her work as a public accountant, she also worked in the banking industry. Crawford jumped eagerly into her board position by volunteering to serve on Achieve's strategic planning committee. When not at work or volunteering, she prefers to be on the water with her husband, Tod, daughter MacKenzie and son, Jameson.

John LeTourneau, an executive leadership coach with CO2 Partners, brings his perspective as a businessperson to the Achieve

board. This perspective should be a great benefit as Achieve maps out its strategic plan for the future. Like Crawford, LeTourneau has volunteered to serve on Achieve's strategic planning committee.

LeTourneau brings business acumen to the board, but he also sees his position as an opportunity to advocate for people with disabilities.

"For my son, and most folks, it never feels like a disability. It's an ability," he said. "It's about identifying those abilities and really maximizing them."

Weaver looks forward to working with the new board members. "As parents of young adults in our program, both John and Sandy bring an important and unique perspective to the board. They are full of energy and enthusiasm and both bring significant private-sector business experience that will be invaluable as we strive to expand employment opportunities for our participants." 

A sneak peak at Achieve's strategic plan

Achieve's board of directors and senior staff have been completing a Strategic Planning process to map out a course for success and growth during the coming years. Here's what's in the hopper:

- Diversify revenue sources
- Look at hiring a business development director to create participant-staffed businesses
- Expand board of directors
- Enhance relationships with schools to create a seamless transition between school and work
- Increased collaboration with other providers
- Build on our network of businesses providing work to Achieve – inhouse and in the community

Sandy Crawford



John LeTourneau





From Africa to Minnesota: Two Achieve participants become U.S. citizens

Toch Biel Tang and Farida Khan were both born on the continent of Africa.

Toch in Sudan and Farida in Guyana. Africa is a long way from Minnesota, Achieve and gaining U.S. citizenship and each of these Achieve participants has story worth telling.

Toch Biel Tang – originally from Sudan – was living in a refugee camp in Ethiopia prior to coming to the United States. Sudan was in the middle of a war and staying there was no longer safe for Toch or his family. They decided to immigrate to the U.S. Toch was just 4 years old at the time. That was approximately 18 years ago.

Toch’s mother did not receive approval to move, so he left with his uncle, aunt and three cousins. As Toch entered adulthood, it became important to him that he acquire U.S. citizenship.

“Toch wanted to become a citizen because he wanted the right to vote,” explained Achieve program manager Tina Stofferahn. “All of Toch’s cousins are U.S. citizens and this is his home so it only makes sense for him to become a citizen as well.”

Becoming a citizen is a complex process. To start, Toch contacted the correct sources and completed the necessary paperwork – lots of it. He was interviewed by homeland security, fingerprinted, photographed and had a background check completed. After passing all the prereq-



Toch Biel Tang


uisites for citizenship, Toch was sworn in as a United States citizen at a ceremony at Bethel College. The whole process took about one year from beginning to end.

Toch is excited about the opportunities and responsibilities that come with citizenship. One of these may include getting to see his mother. She now lives in Australia and attaining citizenship allows him to get a Visa and visit her there.

Farida Khan’s parents and sisters were living in the U.S; she was still in Guyana. She wanted to join them here and in 2004 was able to do so. In August, 2007, she began working at Achieve. Farida was living and working in the United States, but she wasn’t a citizen of the country. This meant complications with Medical Assistance and insurance.

“She was on emergency medical assistance, so each time she went to the doctor she paid a lot and with her limited income it was quite a hardship,” said Jim Rooker, Achieve program manager. “Qualifying for regular medical assistance required citizenship.”

Farida’s group home initiated the process, which was similar to the one that Toch Tang completed. She completed the requirements and was granted citizenship in August of this year.

Toch Tang was helped through the citizenship process by a family friend, Genevieve Powell. She attended the swearing in ceremony with Toch. “People come to the United States for better or worse,” she said. “They have a dream that it will be better here than where they came from. In Toch’s case, he may not have survived if he had stayed where he was.” 



Farida Kahn

Achieve at work: At the Lindwood Country Store

The Lindwood Country Store is a family-run business that offers a little bit of everything to its customers. “We have a restaurant that sells mostly pizza, subs, hamburgers and French fries,” said owner, Kim Leroux. “We have a convenience store that sells groceries and greeting cards and a bait shop.”

While you might expect to find groceries and pizza at a convenience store, you might be surprised to find locally created pieces of art. “We offer items made by local artists from Industries Inc., which is a program for adults with disabilities in Mora and Cambridge,” said Kim. “We try to support the community.”

It was this spirit of support that influenced Leroux and her husband, Joe, when they decided to hire someone to help them around the store with basic cleaning and maintenance, they thought of one of their customers, Ty Beaudette, Achieve participant and avid fisherman – not necessarily in that order.

Beaudette and his family met Kim and Joe when they moved to the area about a year ago. “We knew Ty,” said Kim. “He’d come to the bait shop because he loves to fish. When we were considering hiring someone we thought of him and approached his parents first. They directed us to call Achieve.”

Kim talked with Pete Schlichtmann at Achieve and described the job. “I went and visited with the Kim and Joe and we went over a list of things that needed to be done for the job,” said Schlichtmann. “Ty cleans out the minnow tanks, rinses off the leaches and mops the bait shop. He sweeps and mops the entire store and restaurant area, cleans the restrooms, dusts and wipes down the tables and chairs. He does a little bit of everything as is needed.”

“He does everything he can to help out,” said Kim. “He interacts with customers and cracks

jokes with them. I tell them if anyone needs to know fishing secrets to talk to Ty.”

Kim says her experience with Achieve has been a positive one. “They’re very good. They care about their clients and the businesses they work with,” she said. “They want to make it a win-win situation.”

Sounds like everyone’s happy, including Ty. Especially on payday.

“I think he spends most of his paycheck on bait,” Kim joked.



Ty Beaudette

Tips for hiring workers with disabilities: creating a successful partnership

According to Pete Schlichtman, Achieve employment specialist, the key to success when hiring workers is planning and communication. “Hiring a worker with a disability requires the same considerations for hiring any worker,” he said.


Here are some of his top tips:

- Be specific about job duties and expectations. Write down the job duties in as much detail as possible. If tasks are complex, break them down into smaller steps.
- Look at the overall environment of the worksite and make sure it is a good match with the worker. Are there lots of co-workers to interact with? Will there be a lot of supervision? Not much supervision? Are there physical considerations – stairs, uneven floors etc.
- Set up a regular schedule of communication.
- Communicate with the worker, job coach and Achieve about all expectations. If a problem arises, call so that it can get remedied sooner rather than later.

Weaver, continued from cover

Long term goals include refocusing programs and services to better reflect participant needs, maximize revenue-generating opportunities and to build on Achieve's already strong reputation in the community.

Making Achieve a stronger and more viable program is no easy task, and Weaver understands this. "We can't do it alone," he said. "From staff to our board to participants' families and other supporters – we all need to be united in our fight to preserve funding and opportunities for people with disabilities."

Weaver sees this campaign moving in a positive direction – within Achieve, the local community and the state. "What excites me is the growing recognition among Minnesota employers that hiring people with disabilities provides many benefits that include, but go way beyond, the impact on a balance sheet. I hope this will translate into more diverse and challenging employment opportunities for our participants," he said. 

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Writing and design by Jill Fertler

The Achiever is published quarterly by Achieve Services, Incorporated, a private, non-profit day training and habilitation service which provides work and other opportunities for people with developmental disabilities.



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