

# Achiever

Building skills, careers and independence

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## Collaboration: working with schools to create stories of success

Darrell Pelarski



The transition from school to work can be a stressful one. It brings changes in schedules, environments and expectations; and change is often difficult. Achieve Services and Anoka Hennepin District 11 have a history of working together to make the school to work transition as seamless – and stressless – as possible.

According to Pete Schlichtmann, community employment specialist, it's a practice that benefits everyone involved. "Achieve benefits because we get to know the students, their abilities and what kinds of work they like to do," he said. "The school benefits because they are able to provide students with different work experiences. The students benefit by learning about Achieve, different work options available to them and by what it feels like to cash a paycheck."

Darrell Pelarski is one person who has benefited from this program. Pelarski was a student with District 11 when he first came to Achieve to try working at Achieve's inhouse workshop.

"It didn't take long for us to see his skills and get him working in the community at a Holiday Station Store," said Schlichtmann. "Within a month of first coming to Achieve, Darrel was working in the community five days a week as part of an enclave of workers."


For Pelarski, the success story was just beginning.

"Darrell did well at Holiday," said Schlichtmann. "He was well liked by co-workers and

customers. In fact, one customer was so impressed the he promised to get Darrell a job at his Merwin pharmacy just down the road. Darrell liked that idea because he'd be independent on the job there and that appealed to him.

Pelarski graduated from high school and officially joined Achieve as a member of its Supported Employment Services Program. Through that program, Pelarski applied for a job at the Merwin pharmacy.

"He had an interview, filled out paperwork and started working there the next week," said Schlichtmann. "He was able to work more hours and earn more than in his previous job. Achieve provided him with job coaching until he was able to complete his duties independently. Staff from Achieve check on him periodically, but he is mainly working on his own."

For Pelarski, I guess you could still say that the success story is just beginning. 

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# WIN-WIN



**By: Richard Bro, CEO  
Achieve Services, Inc.**

*At a recent Achieve open house, I had a number of parents approach me to express their appreciation for Achieve's program. They went on to articulate, each in their own way, how Achieve has enriched their son or daughter's life.*

I left with a very warm and satisfying feeling. I also realized how fortunate I am to be involved in a career where efforts are appreciated.

Some people may work for years in their profession and only hear from others when they've done something wrong. At Achieve we aren't perfect, and we do make mistakes, but to be in a profession that serves individuals that want and appreciate the services they receive is, well, pretty special.

When a new employee starts work at Achieve, we schedule them for about 30 hours of orientation before they start working directly with participants. One small part of that orientation involves sitting down with me for half an hour.

First, I congratulate them for being hired because that usually means they had to beat out a formidable group of applicants. Then we talk about what they want to receive from their job with


Achieve. I tell them that their employment with us should be a win-win situation. They should gain skills and experiences in their position; Achieve should benefit from having an employee with those skills on staff.

I tell them that it is Achieve's job to mentor and support them; that we will give them the tools so they can do the job they were hired to do. In return, it is their responsibility to honor the values of high quality, consistent and compassionate services that Achieve has come to represent.

We usually have a happy ending. Achieve can boast of its low staff turnover – usually less than four percent per year. This is practically unheard of in our business, but it's a statistic that's important and meaningful to us.

We feel that having consistent and experienced staff members provides a continuity for participants that adds to the quality of services they receive here. And, that can lead to positive comments from consumers and their family members – like I received at our open house.

Those comments will be shared with staff, because they worked to earn them. The end result should produce a healthy dose of job satisfaction.

I am always interested in what our stakeholders have to say. It helps us to be sensitive to what our customers are looking for and to make adjustments to keep that satisfaction on both sides. It's a win-win situation, and with that, everybody's happy. 

## ***U.S. Labor Department:***

### **Expectation + Opportunity = Full Participation**

#### **October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month**

and the U.S. Department of Labor is urging businesses to embrace the richness of America's diversity by considering the talents of all workers, including workers with disabilities.

The Labor Department's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) envisions a world in which people with disabilities have unlimited employment opportunities.

ODEP is the nation's first assistant secretary-led office that addresses policies that impact upon the employment of people with disabilities. The office provides national leadership on disability employment policy by developing and influencing the use of evidence-based disability employment policies and practices, building collaborative partnerships, and delivering authoritative and credible data on the employment of people with disabilities.

# Susan Holden uses business skills and legislative know-how to benefit Achieve

Susan Holden

## By all accounts, Susan Holden has found success.

As an attorney, she's achieved just about every distinction and honor available in the profession including serving as President of both the Minnesota State Bar and Hennepin County Bar. She's a partner in her law firm, Sieben Grose, Von Holtum & Carey, Ltd. where she specializes in personal injury, product liability, dram shop liability, auto accident and insurance litigation. Most recently she's chaired a panel created by the state Legislature to consider claims regarding the August 2007 35W bridge collapse.

One might think – one could think – that being a lawyer occupies all of her time and energy. That thinking would be incorrect. In between litigation, meetings and committee memberships, Holden finds time for the good things in life; gardening, art, fine dining, wine, travel, hunting, fishing, photography, horses and golf are just a few of her interests. Does the woman ever stop?

Not yet. Because we haven't touched on the volunteer work that Holden does for her profession and within her community. It is that volunteer work that brought Holden and Achieve together back in November 2006, when she had just finished her term as President of the Minnesota State Bar Service. It left a slight gap in her

usually overflowing schedule. "My husband and I were new residents to the Blaine area," she said. "I knew that I wanted to get involved in the community. I learned about Achieve and knew that it had a very positive impact in our local community."

After talking with a few Achieve board members, Holden learned that two years prior, Achieve had gone from being a government agency to a private, non-profit entity. "This posed some challenges in areas that I thought I might be able to help with," she said. "The change was a major paradigm shift for the staff. It made the board focus more on the business-end of Achieve."

Rick Bro, Achieve CEO, knew he could put Holden's skills to good use. "We felt fortunate when Susan agreed to be a member of our board," he said. "Her knowledge regarding legislative matters helps us in numerous ways."


While Holden brought her business and legislative expertise to the table, she knew the reason for Achieve's success and reputation in the community boiled down to the quality of its staff. "What has always impressed me about Achieve is the culture in the staff that is so committed to their clients," she said. "Everything they do is about good outcomes for their clients. People don't stay in a workplace



where they don't feel valued. The staff longevity at Achieve is remarkable."

When it comes to the future, Holden predicts change, challenges and positive outcomes. "I think the future for Achieve is bright," she said. "But there will be challenges. Just like with any private enterprise, we'll need to be concerned about making sure that we are continually serving the needs of the clients, and those needs can change on a year-to-year or periodic basis. Add to this the fact that budget constraints and governmental funding are also a concern. Our goal will be to maintain a predictable, steady base of funding and to find diversity in funding so we can maintain strong, cutting-edge programs that meet client needs."

When it comes to helping Achieve remain cutting-edge, one thing is for sure: Holden's tenacity and skills are an asset in the process.

"Achieve provides a valuable service to the community," she said. "I'm proud to be affiliated with the program." 

# Randy's Transformations

Randy Rogers

When Randy Rogers began working at Achieve in June 2008, Achieve staff quickly learned a number of things about him.

"Randy came to us with an interest in making money and a strong motivation to learn," said Jim Rooker, program manager. "But he had some physical limitations that created barriers to his doing more traditional jobs. As we observed him, we noticed that he was very adept at using his cell phone despite significant hand tremors."

Since Randy's situation provided some challenges, Rooker and others took his case to the Achieve Creative Employment Options Group (ACEOP), which is set up to explore new job ideas and opportunities for individuals.

"We looked at jobs that would use Randy's skills and minimize his tremors," said Rooker.

The ACEOP came up with the idea of converting VHS tapes to DVDs. The job had an added benefit in that it related to Randy's love of video gaming.

"We did some research and found a machine that does the conversions," said Rooker. "The process to convert VHS tapes to DVD is quite complicated and counter-intuitive. After multiple trials, we developed a step-by-step picture and written-instruction book so that Randy could complete the task on his own. He's been very successful and hardly needs to use the book anymore."


The name of the endeavor is Randy's Transformations.

Since this is Randy's business, he reaps the profits. "He sets some money aside for purchasing DVDs," said Rooker. "But he gets all the profit. Recently he used



some of his funds to purchase an advertisement for his business in the area shopper."

If you have VHS tapes that you'd like converted to DVD (and who doesn't) bring them to Randy's Transformations at Achieve. Cost

varies, depending on the length of tape. Under an hour is \$5; one to two hours is \$15, with discounts for multiple-tape orders. For more information, contact Achieve at (763) 783-4909. 

## *Remembering Shawn Herbranson*

Shawn Herbranson was friend to all and greeted everyone with a smile, hug or both.


"He would light up a room when he walked in," said training assistant Sherri Oxley. "He was one of the most compassionate people I knew. When someone looked sad, Shawn was the first person to offer a hug and kind word."

Shawn had many skills as a worker and he took a lot of pride in doing a good job.

"One of his favorite jobs was recycling," said Oxley. "He knew the recycle route by heart. The staff from every area knew Shawn well."

Shawn was fun loving and enjoyed a good joke. One of his favorite times of the year was Halloween.

"He'd sneak into the bathroom and come out in a scary costume," said Oxley. "He'd walk around like a zombie making scary ghost noises for all to see and hear."

Shawn passed away unexpectedly of a brain hemorrhage in August in Arizona, where he was visiting his mother. The two hadn't seen each other in a long time. 



# Achieve adds aluminum to its recycling efforts with community-wide participation

Achieve participants have always been advocates for recycling. For years, Achieve participants have overseen the recycling efforts throughout the Blaine Human Service Center where Achieve is located. This recycling involves paper.

Most recently, participants have expanded their efforts: to aluminum.

John Andersen, training specialist, oversees the aluminum recycling efforts. "The cans are collected from recycling bins throughout the building," he said. "We have a recycling trailer located in the west parking lot of the Human Service Center where people can drop off cans. And, we've partnered with several businesses in the area that have volunteered to put our pop bottle shaped

recycling containers near their business." Andersen reports that about nine different Achieve participants complete a number of steps to prepare the cans for recycling.



"Achieve provides the service of leaving recycling containers, collecting the cans once each month, cleaning the containers and replacing recycling bags," said Andersen. "After the cans have been collected, participants then sort out the garbage and bottles, etc. Once sorted, the aluminum cans are put in bags to await the next trip to the recycling center."

Andersen reports that participants are also involved with taking the cans to the center for recycling. "Participants removed the bags of cans from the trailer and pour the aluminum into the can hopper at the recycling center," he said.

Participants involved are paid for each step of the recycling process – collecting cans from businesses and throughout the Human Service Center, sorting and bringing the cans to the recycling center.

"When the jobs available in the workshop are limited to those with higher skill levels, the can sorting job is an excellent one for many of our participants," said Andersen. "The favorite job of most is going to the recycling center because they actually see how much we make from the work we do."

Participants involved also get the added perk of being paid in cash. "Once the money is sorted out according to how much time each participant contributed, it is divided up and put into envelopes," Andersen said. "Participants are excited to receive cash for their work."

## Achieve handmade notecards and gift tags available at Banfill-Locke Center for the Arts

Banfill-Locke Center for the Arts (BLCA) in Fridley is a wellspring for the community providing inspiration, enrichment, enjoyment, opportunities, and education through the arts. It is also a place to purchase handmade Achieve notecards and gift tags.

The notecards and gift tags are made by Achieve participants as part of occupational therapy and will be sold through the Banfill-Locke Gift Shop.

"We learned that BLCA was accepting gift shop submissions from local artists," Achieve program manager, Jim Rooker said. "After an Achieve staff member made initial contact with the gift shop, I brought over a sample of notecards and gift tags that we make and they said they would sell both."

The gift shop is hosting an open house on October 16 to reveal their newest changes, which include featuring a local artist each month. BLCA is located at 6666 East River Road in Fridley. The gift shop is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 am to 4 pm. BLCA is a nonprofit community art center that supports and encourages the work of developing and established artists and provides resources and opportunities in the arts for individuals of all ages, backgrounds, and skill levels. BLCA recognizes art to be a powerful tool for the cultivation of strong,

healthy, harmonious community life. For more information on Banfill-Locke Center for the Arts, visit their website at [info@banfill-locke.org](mailto:info@banfill-locke.org).




## Gift tags handmade from recycled materials

Looking for something unique and special to decorate your gifts this holiday season (or through the year)? Achieve gift tags fill the bill.

The tags are made of recycled greeting cards and scrapbook paper, making the green as well as good-looking. Participants use a special punch to give the two-by-three-inch tag its recognizable shape and then stamp a "to" and "from" on the back.

"Because the cards used are all different, each tag is unique," said Jim Rooker, program manager. "I've been really impressed with the quality and how nice they look on a package."

The tags come in three varieties: Christmas decorative (made from Christmas cards), Christmas plain (made with red or green paper) and All-occasion. They are sold in packs of 10 for \$2.00 and can be purchased at Achieve or the Banfill-Locke Center for the Arts. 

# OPERATION WRITE HOME:

## *Achieve reaches out to troops overseas*


Operation Write Home (formerly Cards for Heroes) is all about helping the heroes serving in the U.S. armed services keep in touch with home. This is done by sending blank, homemade greeting cards to write home on and cards of gratitude to give encouragement and express thanks.

According to Jim Rooker, program manager, Achieve became aware of the organization when a foster parent bought Achieve notecards to send to servicemen and women in Iraq and Afghanistan. "She described what this organization does and why and we thought it would be a way of supporting our troops," he said.

Achieve now serves as a collection spot for the Operation Write Home cards. "Anyone can drop off their homemade cards at Achieve," said Rooker. "Or if they don't have home-

made cards, they can purchase Achieve notecards to send. We'll package them up and send them to Operation Write Home. Operation Write Home only sends homemade cards. They prefer general themed cards (happy birthday, miss you, holidays and cards for children) that fit into a standard envelope (4.25" x 5.5").

Cards should not be decorated with sparkles or glitter (they can make heroes visible at night). Blank cards as well as cards of thanks and encouragement are needed. If you'd like to bring in cards for upcoming holidays, the deadlines are: Thanksgiving – October 5, Christmas and Hannukkah – November 1.

For more information on Operation Write Home, check out their website at: [www.operationwritehome.org](http://www.operationwritehome.org). 

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