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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- The cooking class hosted a wonderful retirement luncheon for Rich Groux.
- Because of the hard work of our job developers, MRC recently increased our funding by 25% this year.
- The Book Club just finished Tom Sawyer and is now beginning Huckleberry Finn.
- After this long winter, we all are looking forward to the warmth of a summer sun.

Community Options, Inc.

Spring 2014

Spotlight On Our Small Business Owners

Community Options' philosophy is that each of us has been given gifts. We strive to assist everyone served in pursuing those gifts; their uniqueness by helping people find work that is personally meaningful. In a sense, we do this by helping people highlight their talents. While one person might love working at a horse farm, another person would flat-out refuse to even go near the barns. Someone might love working in an office of a hospital, while someone else would be bored out of their mind in that setting.

And for a small handful of individuals, their gifts have led them to creating small businesses of their own. One such entrepreneur is Mr. Jack Riedel of Amherst. He began his small photography business in 2005. His work led him to host a number of small shows, but recently his focus has been creating greeting cards. Though he still sells larger images and has his own website, he sells these cards at a number of shops in the surrounding communities. Crazy Moon in South Hadley, Dickinson Farm in Granby, and Hastings in Amherst are just a few.

Not quite a year ago, Ms. Kate Turner took over a snack box business shortly after her move back to Western MA. It has been a great way for Kate to meet new people and get to know the local area again. Kate prides herself in the display of the customized boxes, switching out the boxes as promised, and creating a professional, reliable business. She hopes to expand her customer base and is always looking for new products to satisfy her current customer needs.



Ms. Lisa Marie Brown has a flare for fashion and design. With this interest, she began making jewelry. She attended jewelry-making classes, has focused her product to capture the interest of adults which has evolved into very unique, substantial products. She sold her earring & jewelry at a recent DDS exhibit, and while exploring other options, hopes to begin selling her products at local retail stores in Belchertown, Amherst, and Northampton.

If you want to hear more about these businesses, please do not hesitate to call the main office.

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Our newsletter provides information about programs, people, and events. It contains news about you, our programs, the people who make them possible, and information for consumers, family members, staff, and volunteers. We want this to be **your** newsletter, so please send your ideas, news, and any information you'd like included in future editions to: Newsletter PO Box 1352, Belchertown, MA 01007.

Why Does Nick Siano Jump In Freezing Cold Water?

Saturday, February 22 Mr. Nick Siano of Palmer, MA, participated in The Polar Plunge at Nantasket Beach in Hull, MA. Nick says it's "the best

So far the Plungers have worked together to raise over \$2.9 million for the athletes of Special Olympics Massachusetts.

day at the beach all year - even in the winter! Every year Special Olympics Massachusetts' bravest

supporters are "Freezin' for a Reason" when they plunge into the icy waters of the Atlantic. Nick says that it was low tide, but warm. This is Nick's 2nd year doing the plunge. So far this year, he has raised \$248, but donations are still being accepted.

Nick has been a participant in the Special Olympics for 11 years, and is looking forward to the summer games, June 6th - 8th in Boston. Nick is a member of the Hampshire



Nick Siano (red sox poncho) readies himself to jump in the icy waters of the Atlantic for a good cause

Eagles Volleyball team. If you would like to help Nick as well as the Special Olympics of Massachusetts, go online to www.specialolympicsma.org/sponsorplunger and enter the name, Nicholas Siano.

Artists In Our Midst Honors Meagan Bell



Photo by Meagan Bell

Community Options was honored to be represented in the second annual "ARTISTS IN OUR MIDST" Art show . Held from Nov 21 through December 28, 2013, at the DDS area office on 88 Front Street, Holyoke, this exhibition celebrated the photography, paintings, jewelry, crafts, sculptures and ceramics of local area artists receiving services from the Holyoke-Chicopee Department of Developmental Services. Artists who are affiliated with Community Options included Anita Marcil and Jack Riedel, who contributed cards made from their photographs, and handmade jewelry by Lisa Marie Brown. Judy Carle contributed with both handmade wine bottle bags and a quilt. Larry Ditman displayed pictures and sold cards, while Alaina Madore displayed art that was created during art classes.

This year's event was made even more special by honoring Meagan Bell. Meagan was a very talented individual who worked for many years with Community Options in a variety of different businesses.



Alaina Madore stencils a shopping bag



Lisa Marie Brown working on bracelets

ANNOUNCEMENTS

*****Giving Back:** During the 'off season' the Lawn Care crew spent part of their time painting a couple rooms at the Congregational Church in Belchertown. Your donation of time and energy was very much appreciated by the Church members. Hope you had fun while gaining new skills. Great job Bill, Carl, David, Rich, Josh, & Nick.

*****Please welcome Mr. Nick Pinto** of Belchertown to the C.O. Lawn Care as the new manager. He started March 10th to become familiar with the business and to get to know the crew. Good luck Nick.

*****While the spring and fall clean up jobs are very busy,** the Lawn Care crew has openings for mowing jobs. Please pass the word.

***** Ms. Alaina Madore, Mr. Jack Riedel, & _____** will be participating in the Opening Day at the Stone House Musuem on May 10th. Please stop & visit by their booth from 9:00-2:00pm.

Sugar Eggs Sweeten Easter at Rannsaka Crafts



Back in the late 1980's, when Community Options, Inc. had been level funded for a number of years it became harder and harder to meet the rising costs without cutting services to the individuals being served. The Agency took a novel idea of fundraising. We began making and selling sugar eggs. For the first few years, order forms were in many of the local businesses. Video Studio 19, Making Waves, Swift River Crafts,

Country Bank, and other businesses took orders for us. They were sold not only at Rannsaka but at the local churches that held Bingo and square dancing. These old-fashioned eggs are not for ingesting but rather a bit of decorating for the Easter season. If stored properly they will last for many years. They continue to be made and sold at Rannsaka and Atkins Fruit Farm. The supply is limited, so don't wait to pick up one or two.

The Way We Do The Thing We Do

Community Options and Natural Supports

Community Options, founded in 1977, has been providing community-based, supported employment services for adults with disabilities now since 1981. Thirty-three years... that's a long time! I myself have been at the agency now as a Job Developer for almost twenty-two of those years. I have seen many changes, but one thing that hasn't changed is our commitment to **natural supports** on the job. Why do we choose to do things this way? Wouldn't it be easier to get someone hired with a promise to the employer that a job coach will provide the training and support?

I suppose the answer to that question is yes. However, doing what's right isn't always the easiest thing to do. Yes, the goal of this or any vocational agency is

to find people jobs. But for us, the means are just as important as the end, and we feel they directly shape what that end will look like.

We want a person's work experience to resemble that of a non-disabled employee as much as

“Natural supports” means that supervisors and co-workers provide the training and guidance a person needs

possible. And we want the job to reflect who *they* are and what *they* want to do. “Natural supports” means that supervisors and co-workers provide the training and guidance a person needs (after all, they know the job!), like they do

for all other employees. No great mystery here: *teach* by explanation and example, *redirect* if needed, *remind* when necessary. This gets the staff directly involved. They get to know the person, and along the way, relationships naturally form. Maybe they even extend beyond the workplace (hopefully yes!).

This is no small consideration, because integration is an important component of what we are trying to do. Additionally, the stigma of a job coach is eliminated. The person gains the dignity that comes from getting their work done themselves, and the respect and support of their co-workers as they help the person succeed. One might consider this a more “holistic” approach to supported employment. I wouldn't disagree. *by Paul Yandoli*

Happy Retirement Rich Groux

Rich Groux began his work with Community Options, Inc. in 2001, and has assisted the people served by Community Options in many roles - as job developer, driver, crew supervisor, and most recently manager of the CO Lawn Care Business. In all of these roles, Rich taught and provided support in a respectful, dignified manner. He was always a friend and asset to the organization. Sadly, Rich has decided to retire. “I feel I can start those projects that I never had time to do before...and before I get too old to do them!” he said. “I do very much appreciate the time you allowed me to stay with and continue working with this mobile group” he added. “They are a great bunch of guys, motivated, with a lot of character and a ton of personality!” While we will miss Rich, we thank him for everything he's done and wish him many happy days!

