

A NEWSLETTER FOR ASPIRE'S FAMILY AND FRIENDS



Serving Aging Adults in the Future

Aspire's Adult Services meets a growing need

left: David and Barron

right: Todd Fritz

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When Todd Fritz was born in 1962 his mother, Elizabeth, was told her newborn, diagnosed with Down syndrome, wouldn't live past the age of two. Todd is 46 now and relishes his shiny, red walker, which he pushes with cheerful abandon, despite the ill effects of having severe arthritis in one hip and three open-heart surgeries.

Todd says he loves working at **Aspire Industries**, the agency's bustling workshop in Hillside. Today he's assembling a food tray for a frozen food maker. When he's back at his home in Westchester, where he lives with seven other housemates, Todd is likely to be found watching wrestling and hockey on TV, wearing his much-loved Army hat, or admiring his Michael Jordan poster on the wall of his bedroom. Todd gets around the house with the help of mobility accommodations, like grab bars and chairs in the bathroom and a ramp out in front of the house to accommodate the potential need of a wheelchair one day.

People with Down syndrome age about 20 years faster than the rest of us, so

Todd's health problems are fairly typical, explains Marcy Nelson Hadley, Vice President of Adult Services at Aspire. In general, people with developmental disabilities are living longer than they did 20 years ago, probably because more doctors and caretakers are better trained to deal with the complications that come with some conditions, says Hadley.

In suburban Cook County alone, there are approximately 9,320 adults with developmental disabilities who are age 60 or older. At Aspire, more than one third of the residents living in our community homes are age 55 or older and this number is rising. Older adults are at risk for developing health conditions like arthritis, osteoporosis and hip dysplasia, which can make it much harder to get around. These adults also experience cognitive declines, which means they need services to keep them active, involved and social so they can remain independent as long as possible, says Hadley.

Caring for aging adults has become a key challenge for Aspire. Health and aging



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT:

Employees Who Care



EVERY YEAR, THE EMPLOYEES OF TradeLink LLC, an asset management and trading firm in Chicago, are given three days of time off to engage in volunteer work. Aspire is fortunate to be on the receiving end of the good deeds offered by that charitable and forward-thinking company.

Three years ago, TradeLink’s Chairman, Walt Weissman, asked office manager Lori Shatava to look into volunteer opportunities for TradeLink employees. Weissman thought it was the right thing to do. “Everyone is encouraged to give back and our employees are given the time off work to volunteer,” explains Shatava.

The first year of the volunteer program, which the company calls “TradeLink Cares,” employee volunteers sorted through donations at Aspire on Broadway, Aspire’s resale shop in Melrose Park. TradeLink’s volunteers, many of whom are traders, product development professionals and administrators, dug right into the piles of clothes and household items that needed to be processed and sorted for sale.

For the last three years, a group of employees at TradeLink have become the unofficial ambassadors of gardening and landscaping for Aspire. They have helped to beautify the exterior of four

community homes, and created a butterfly garden outside of the Litt Center, which houses Aspire’s life skills training and employment workshop. The employee volunteers also planted a vegetable garden at Aspire on Eastern, where the residents pick tomatoes and herbs to include in their meals!

“After we finish the gardening work, we always get a tour of the building and program where we are volunteering,” says Shatava. “It’s nice to meet the people who live and work at Aspire and it’s good that we can offer our help.”

Aspire’s Special Events Coordinator, Susan Ondreja, welcomes the can-do spirit from TradeLink employees. “I’m looking forward to whatever planting project they want to work on this spring. We really appreciate their help and dedication. They are a great group of people.”

For more information about volunteering opportunities for individuals or employee groups at Aspire, please contact **Julie Gies**, Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator, 708.547.3550 x3554 or jgies@aspireofillinois.org.

BIG CITY NIGHT—*Rio*

IT MAY HAVE BEEN A COLD NIGHT IN CHICAGO, but it was warm and tropical at the 11th Annual Big City Night – RIO on Saturday, February 21 at the Hyatt Regency Chicago. Gala goers found themselves transformed as they stepped into the South American paradise of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Dr. Sandy Goldberg, health and nutrition correspondent at NBC5 Chicago, emceed the Latin-themed event, which was attended by more than 350 friends of Aspire and featured a gourmet dinner, dancing and entertainment. Despite the economic climate, the event was a resounding success, raising more than \$165,000 for Aspire Children’s Services.

Aspire honored Kevin Hitzeman and Mary Dempsey with the Geraldine Post Breaker ‘Building Their Future’ Award, which is given to Aspire supporters who lead the way through their powerful example and generosity.



Our President :



I send a hearty and heartfelt **THANK YOU** to Aspire's family of supporters in the Chicagoland area and across the nation.

The past year has been most challenging, as our economy has sunk into a deep recession. This crisis was made worse by the behavior of ex-Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich, which brought our state government to a standstill. Because of these factors, Aspire now receives greatly delayed funding from the State of Illinois—by three to four months.

But this year, supporters (both old and new, near and far) have reached out to support us in record numbers. Your wish that children and adults with disabilities be able to “reach a little farther and a little higher” has sustained and strengthened us. Thanks to your ongoing support, Aspire will weather the storm . . . and thrive.

On behalf of more than 1,000 children and adults with disabilities and their families, thank you for your continued belief in Aspire's mission.

JIM KALES, President & CEO, Aspire

“We try to be attuned to the changing physical and social needs of aging adults.”



needs are increasing costs at a time when public funding from the state is declining. This is why a new Aging with Dignity Initiative has been launched, in part thanks to funding from the Community Memorial Foundation and an anonymous foundation.

Aspire is in the process of retrofitting some of its 16 community homes to make them universally accessible to persons with a wide variety of mobility issues, helping aging adults to remain in a home in the community. Aspire is also working to better coordinate the medical care of our aging adults. Aspire has hired a trained nurse to help coordinate the wide range of health care needs for its aging residents. “We have more than 100 adults living in our community homes, and many see several doctors and specialists and require follow up care. We want to make sure the residents' medical care is well-coordinated and they stay as healthy as possible,” says Hadley.

Aspire has specialized later life day services to meet the needs of aging residents who are no longer able to participate in developmental training programs. The Senior Day Program helps participants pursue activities that they find interesting and meaningful, but at a slower pace. “We try to be attuned to the changing physical and social needs of aging adults. This is a place where residents get to enjoy their golden years, much the way other seniors do,” says Hadley.

Todd's 84-year-old mother, Elizabeth Fritz, says that while she worries about her son living out his senior years, she is comforted by the fact that he has a younger brother, Lee, who can step in when she and her husband are no longer able to care for their firstborn. She's happy that “Toddy” is living in a safe and accessible group home and doing well despite his health difficulties. “That gives me peace of mind,” she says.



< *Maureen Beal, CEO and President of National Van Lines, with husband Truitt Beal*

Below, guests spin the RIO Prize Wheel



< *TOP LEFT: Mary Jane Goldthwaite-McCampbell and John Goldthwaite learn to samba*

< *BOTTOM LEFT: Kevin Hitzeman and Mary Dempsey*

A very special thank you to our sponsors whose contributions helped to underwrite the costs of the event:

- Bill and Cynthia Caruso
- The Claddagh Foundation, Inc.
- Donald J. Allen
- Drs. Joyce and Anthony Kales
- Good Heart, Work Smart Foundation
- Marquis Jet Partners
- National Van Lines
- Pan American Bank
- The Village of Bellwood
- Wilson Boyles and Company

thank you!

Building Business Partnerships

YOU'VE HEARD THE ADAGE "When times get tough, the tough get going." In this economic environment, Aspire has to work smarter and harder to develop employment opportunities for adults with disabilities and to increase our bottom line funding.

Thus, the birth of Aspire's new approach to job development and funding for services, called the **Aspire Business Partnership Initiative**. The initiative is a proactive way to build long-term relationships with local companies and develop job opportunities for Aspire participants, while finding new revenue through those alliances and partnerships. Another key goal is to reduce Aspire's reliance on the state for financial support.

Aspire has always worked hard to provide its participants with job opportunities, both at Aspire Industries (our employment workshop for adults with developmental disabilities) and through area businesses. "But the recession has made it hard out there for people with developmental disabilities," says Jim Kales, Aspire's President and CEO.

Nationally, the unemployment rate for people with any type of disability is 70

percent, but that climbs to 90 percent for people with intellectual or cognitive disabilities. Given these trends, says Kales, a bold, new approach is needed. "Our model in the past has been to seek out job, sponsorship and employee volunteer opportunities on a sort of piecemeal basis, but now we are tying those opportunities together in a more coordinated fashion," says Kales. "Rather than have several different representatives from Aspire approach businesses for different "asks", we're now visiting with, for example, the vice president for community affairs at a company and saying, 'how can we work together?' It's a more coordinated approach that's reaping good results," says Kales.

Kales says the early response to the initiative has been very encouraging. "The doors have been open. Businesses are interested in hearing about us and want to get involved." The benefits to the company may include recognition of its business and employees in media stories

and on Aspire's website, the promotion of the business' name and logo in sponsored events, and advertisements in Aspire's program books.

Here are a few basic ways businesses can partner with Aspire:

- **sponsoring** an Aspire program or event
- **subcontracting work** to Aspire Industries (e.g. packaging, collating, or sorting jobs)
- participating in **volunteer team building projects** at Aspire for the company's employees
- **hiring an adult with a developmental disability** through Aspire's Community Employment program

For more information about Aspire's Business Partnership Initiative, contact **Burt Petkus**, our Business Partnership Developer, at bpetkus@aspireofillinois.org or call 224.623.3958.

The Aspire Business Partnership Initiative is a proactive way to build long-term relationships with local companies.



Partners with Aspire

IT MAY NOT BE BREAKING NEWS, but this is a most welcome headline for Aspire.

NBC5 Chicago has teamed up with Aspire as our events media sponsor. The pairing is a real coup for Aspire because it means NBC's local affiliate will send out its TV personalities for Aspire's special events, offering on-air coverage whenever possible, and place a link on its website to Aspire's site. NBC5 and Aspire have also discussed a wide range of on-air stories about people with developmental disabilities.

"We are thrilled to have this connection and we have Channel 5 reporter Lisa Parker to thank for making this possible," says Pat Curran, Chair of Aspire's Board of Directors. Parker has been a longtime master of ceremonies for Aspire's Beautiful Children Fashion Show.



Dr. Sandy Goldberg

The NBC5-Aspire pairing is already off and running. Dr. Sandy Goldberg, NBC5's health and nutrition correspondent, recently emceed Aspire's very successful Big City Night - RIO gala.

"This is a phenomenal opportunity for us," says Curran. "Teaming up with NBC5 Chicago boosts our visibility and gives us the opportunity to show the outstanding care and compassion our team offers to participants. We know we do great work; here's a way to showcase it."



PARTICIPANT SPOTLIGHT:

Meet Kamren

WHEN ALISON BELL WAS PREGNANT with her second child, an ultrasound revealed her baby might have a serious heart defect. When little Kamren was born three years ago, he was whisked away for tests. The baby was found to have a heart problem, but not the rare heart disorder that was suspected. That news brought relief to Alison and her husband Allan. But later, Kamren tested positive for Down syndrome.

The Bells, of Westchester, spent the first 30 days of Kamren's life traveling back and forth from their home to the hospital to be with their baby. When he was 5 months old, he had open-heart surgery to close a valve. At 17 months, he started receiving speech, physical, and occupational therapy at home after he was evaluated by our professional team at Aspire Children's Services.

Because of his tremendous progress, the Bells have decided to continue three-year-old Kamren's speech and occupational care once a week at Aspire's state-of-the-art **Eamon Shannon Center** in Hillside. Due to requests by families, Aspire recently expanded its services by offering therapies for children ages three to eight.

"He loves it," says Alison of his time at Aspire. "And even though he gets physical, speech and developmental therapies at his preschool, I'm not a part of that. At Aspire, I can watch him and work with the therapists on his development. I get to see those interactions."

In many ways, Kamren is a typical three-year-old, into everything and anything. "I call him my little *Curious George*," says Alison, who is also mom to 5-year-old Kennedy and 12-year-old stepdaughter Lauren.

"Kamren's well on his way and we're looking forward to what the future holds for him."

Kamren likes to help his mom fold clothes, wash dishes and do adult-like chores. He loves to push toy cars around the house and watch "Barney" on TV. He's also not bashful about helping himself to the offerings in the refrigerator. "He's figured out how to open the lock," his mom says with a laugh.

Alison says she's blessed that her son can understand verbal communications, even though he has trouble speaking. Because of speech problems, he has learned sign language and often simultaneously talks and signs to get his point across.

Daughter Kennedy likes to attend Aspire's **SibShops**, a program for brothers and sisters of children with disabilities. Every other month, games and arts and crafts are offered for siblings ages 5 to 12. It gives them a chance to meet other siblings with this unique perspective, so they can share and learn from one another. Therapists running the program offer help in an informal way, letting the kids know how to cope with having a brother or sister with a disability. "Kennedi doesn't really understand the magnitude of her brother's diagnosis," says Alison.

Struggles aside, Alison says finding Aspire has been a godsend for her family. "The staff is the best. It's just a wonderful group of people. We're so pleased with Kamren's progress. He's well on his way and we're looking forward to what the future holds for him."

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Aspire's mission is to provide people with developmental disabilities quality lifetime supports and opportunities to achieve their individual highest potential where they live, learn, work or play.



