



achieve

Empowering People

In This Issue

Annual Awards

*Teacher of the Year
Professional of the Year
Excellence in Self Advocacy*

Advocacy Program

Family Support Night

Volunteer Spotlight

Membership Matters

Showing Off Our True Colors



Giving Hearts Day Success



Giving Hearts Day
impactgiveback.org

Meet Merlin & Peggy

Merlin Johnson knows a thing or two about running a hobby farm. He grew up on one, near Lisbon, ND, along with his parents and two younger sisters.

When he was born, more than seventy years ago, he was very sick and spent quite some time in the hospital. His parents knew that he was likely to have developmental delays, which became apparent by the time Merlin was old enough to attend school.

There were no special education classes back then and after an attempt at sending Merlin to public school, where he lasted exactly one day, they chose to keep him at home.

Soon, the authorities began to make periodic visits to the family, pressuring them to send Merlin to live in the state institution at Grafton.

“It was really intimidating,” said his sister, Peggy Johnson. “I remember sitting on the stairs and listening to the conversations.”

Merlin and Peggy’s parents were adamant, however, that they would not send their son to such a place.



“I didn’t realize the full scope of it until I was an adult,” Peggy said, “and I’m so proud of my parents for standing up to everyone and protecting my brother’s rights, because that just wasn’t done back in the day.”

Their father ran his own road maintenance business and kept pigs, sheep, chickens and cows. So instead of spending his days in an institution, Merlin learned all about raising animals.

He helped feed the animals, milked cows and assisted his father with fixing things around the farm.

Merlin said his favorite memories from childhood are milking the cows and playing with the family dog, Penny.

continued on page 3...



Rachel Hafner Executive Director

Dear Partners,

Welcome to “achieve”, the official newsletter of The Arc, Upper Valley!

We are so excited that you are reading this newsletter today. We hope that as you read, you are uplifted and inspired by the many stories we have compiled about achievement. At The Arc, we believe that every person should reach for the stars and achieve their life’s dreams.

We not only want to share stories of personal achievement but also stories about the people in our community who make meaningful contributions that

achieve

is published by The Arc, Upper Valley located at 2500 DeMers Ave, Grand Forks, ND.

Officers:

President
Joan Karpenko

Treasurer
Pam Heyd

1st Vice President
Ruth Jenny

Secretary
Jody Haug

2nd Vice President
Virginia Esslinger

Executive Director
Rachel Hafner

Immediate Past President
Peggy Johnson

Mission Statement:

The Arc, Upper Valley promotes and protects the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and supports their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes.

The Arc, Upper Valley 701.772.6191

thearcuppervalley.org

positively impact everyone. With that in mind, we want to open “achieve” with a story about a group of parents who want to create more opportunities for play in the Grand Forks community.

Last summer a group of Grand Forks mothers began discussing the lack of indoor play space for small children, a much needed resource in an area where it is too cold to go outside and play for so many months out of the year. Through the course of conversations these mothers identified a need for a free and safe play space that would be accessible to all children, regardless of ability. These conversations eventually led to the development of a committee, led by Laura Vaughn and Jessica Ford.

After many months of hard work, determination and fundraising the committee developed a plan for Midtown Kidtown, a play area that will be located in the east side of the Grand Cities Mall.

“This project is exciting for so many reasons,” Vaughn said “as it will provide an environment that will bring many people in our community together with different backgrounds including individuals with different incomes, nationalities and abilities. Not only will this play area help parents to make new connections but it will also increase traffic in a locally-owned mall, home to many locally-owned businesses.”

While the plans for Midtown Kidtown have been completed, the committee still has a long way to go before their entire project will be finished. This amazing committee of parents, mostly mothers, continues to work hard to create community partnerships necessary to pay for and build this new play space. It is the hope that once this project is completed, it will be a space where children of all ages and abilities can play together inclusively.

In closing, I would like to thank this group of parents for inspiring all of us to dream a little bigger resulting in amazing things for everyone in the community of Grand Forks. Thank you for being part of our achieve team!

Warmly,

For more information about Midtown Kidtown go to facebook.com/midtownkidtown or gofoundation.org.

Merlin & Peggy - continued from page 1

“Every dog we ever had was named Penny,” laughed his sister, “Because he could actually pronounce the name.”

Merlin always had an active social life. He went everywhere with his parents and knew everybody in the small town of Lisbon, and everybody knew him.

He was very blessed to have enjoyed life to the fullest, a far cry from the institutional life he may have led if his parents had not been so strongly opposed to it.

When he was 57 years old, he moved with his mother to Grand Forks, where his sister, Peggy, was a teacher in the public school system. Not long after, their mother passed away and Peggy assumed legal guardianship of Merlin.

For a while, he lived with Peggy, but she realized he needed additional supports to become acclimated to the community in the manner he was accustomed to.

She began looking into a group home setting, but Merlin was completely against it, as he thought it was too much like a nursing home. He wanted his own place.



Young Merlin and another sister on the farm. (getting photo bombed by a chicken)

Seemingly at a dead end, one day Peggy ran into an acquaintance who happened to work at The Arc, Upper Valley. She related her frustration in finding services for Merlin and was invited to visit the office to learn more about community living options and supports.

“I had no idea what our options were. The Arc was there for me when I needed help.”

One month later, Merlin was living independently in his own apartment in a 4-plex and soon made friends with the other tenants in the building. With staff to assist him when needed, he learned to ride the City Bus and began exploring the community. Now in his seventies, he is officially retired, but still goes to Agassiz Enterprises during the weekdays to “supervise” the other workers.

He loves to play pool, a pastime he enjoyed with his father; has been involved in league bowling, takes walks with friends at Special Olympics and attends L.I.S.T.E.N. dances every Friday night. He plans to take a trip to Devils Lake this summer to go fishing.

He says his favorite things about Grand Forks are that it’s a good town and he has his own home.

Merlin and Peggy have a close sibling relationship. Being seven years older and blessed with an excellent memory, Merlin recalls when Peggy was born and watching her drink from a bottle. Consequently, he still sometimes refers to her as “Baby,” in a teasing manner.

They enjoy many outings together. On this day, they were at Perkins for pie and coffee, which is where we caught up with them to hear their story.

Before too long, Merlin was pointing at his watch and reminding Peggy that he had dinner plans that evening.

Asked about his plans, he simply smiled and said, “Pancakes.”

“He goes to every pancake feed and benefit in town”, said Peggy, laughing.

And with that, we parted ways. Because you never want to be late for pancakes.....

Showing Off Our True Colors

True Colors opened in 2006 in downtown Grand Forks and soon became the regions leading specialty retailer of new and gently used upscale womens clothing in sizes 0-28, as well as jewelry and accessories.

On October 1, 2015 The Arc Upper Valley became the new owners of True Colors. It was a perfect fit - The Arc has extensive experience in the second-hand marketplace.



The Arc will hold fast to the vision of former owner, Mickie Nakonechny, and continue to be a leader in resale in Grand Forks by providing the quality customer service that has been a hallmark of the True Colors brand for the past 9 years.

As the parent of a child with a developmental disability, Nakonechny has always been a strong supporter of The Arc, Upper Valley and she will continue to lend her talent and expertise to The Arc and True Colors.

True Colors takes trendy up-to-date items on consignment or purchases them for cash. More information and terms of consignment or sales can be found on the new website at www.truecolorsgf.com.

The store carries authentic designer handbags, premium denim, and new merchandise from boutique brands like Tribal, Free People and Maruca.

Also featured are one-of-a-kind handmade pieces of jewelry and accessories from local artists. Each day is a new shopping experience!

Proceeds from sales at True Colors will fund The Arc's programs for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families to create an inclusive community where everyone reaches their full potential.



Rachel Hafner, Executive Director, outside The Arc, Upper Valley's new business venture, True Colors, located at 8 S 3rd St in Grand Forks.

Advocacy Program

Advocacy has been the legacy of The Arc, Upper Valley since 1955. The Arc was formed because of the early advocacy work of parents and other concerned citizens.

We Are Here to Help

Staff are available to address a variety of issues including, but not limited to, early intervention, education, guardianship, wills and trusts, employment, retirement, benefits, housing, support services, transportation, civic engagement, recreation or other issues that impact a person's life and personal rights. This is accomplished through individual advocacy services, family support, community training and systemic and legislative advocacy.

All *services are free to individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities and their families. To schedule an appointment, call The Arc, Upper Valley at 701.772.6191.

**While The Arc, Upper Valley's programs and special events are open to everyone, regardless of place of residence, advocacy services are only available to North Dakota residents.*

Family Support Night

2016 saw the creation of a new program at The Arc - Family Support Night.

The program, facilitated by family members for family members provides a safe place to find support, share ideas, and problem-solve with other family members of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Meetings are held the second Tuesday of the month in The Arc's new family room. For more information, call 701.772.6191.



Note: At this time, The Arc is unable to provide child care during family support night.



Giving Hearts Day

impactgiveback.org

February 11, 2016

Thanks to our match sponsors and generous donors from the community, \$5,438 was raised for The Arc, Upper Valley on Giving Hearts Day!

This money will go a long way toward providing advocacy and support for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.

Match Donors

H&R Block
Valley Petroleum Equipment
Dr. William & Jody Haug
Dr. Paul Kolstoe
Liz Tyree
Mary McConnell
James & Cynthia Twedell

Giving Hearts Day Donors

Anonymous
Kathy Anderson
Kathy Ashe
Linda Bedard
Barb Brown
Robin David
Eric Demmers
Pam Demmers
Cindy Flom-Meland
Brad & Shelley Fultz
Rachel Hafner
Donna Hastings
Bill Haug
Pamela Henderson
Ruth Jenny
Eric E. Johnson
Peggy Johnson
JLG Architects
Nancy Joyner
Jay & Miranda Kleven
Amanda Kosior

Gayle Laird
David Lambeth
Kate Lewandowski
Todd & Janell Ness
Networking Specialists
Nicole Peske
Leah Reitmeier
Alexander Reichert
Pete Ringbloom
Stacey Robertson
Robert Schultz
Joseph Shelton
Rob & Becky Vakoc



Award Winners Celebrated

Brothers Josh and Jared Rodriguez presented The Arc, Upper Valley's Annual Awards at the annual dinner and meeting held in Grand Forks on November 5, 2015.

Professional of the Year

Among those honored were Cherie Slominski of CHI Friendship, who was presented with the Professional of the Year award for demonstrating sensitivity and providing outstanding support resulting in increased independence for people with intellectual disabilities.

In her nomination letter, Lori Ramsey said, "Cherie has been encouraging people to fulfill their employment goals for the past 16 years."



Cherie Slominski, Professional of the Year, with Josh and Jared Rodriguez

"To help individuals gain independence on the job, Cherie creates binders with task lists and reminders. She bridges friendships between individuals with disabilities and their co-workers and supervisors, creating a natural support network for them."

Excellence in Self Advocacy

Mark Kauk, a lifelong resident of Grand Forks, was honored with the Excellence in Self Advocacy award for his independence and inclusion in the community.



Mark Kauk with Josh and Jared Rodriguez

Mark is well-known in the community as an avid sports fan. He encourages and supports high school and college level athletes and enjoys cheering them on at sporting events. In 2009, He was voted "Fan of the Year" by the Grand Forks Herald.

He writes a column called "Kauker's Corner" that appears in "The Listener," a monthly newsletter by LISTEN DROP IN, where he reports on area athletes and sporting events.

For the past five years, Mark has been instrumental in the annual Self Advocacy Solutions "SHRED THE R WORD" event at UND, which attracts over 500 students. Mark knows so many people on campus and is the first to say, "We don't like the R word. Can you help your buddy not use it? Shred it."

Teacher of the Year

Lin Thorson, who retired in 2015 after 27 years of teaching students with intellectual disabilities, was nominated for the Teacher of the Year award by Janice Kern and Jalene Suda of TACA (Talk About Curing Autism).

Janice Kern said, "Lin is a stand-out in her profession because she goes above and beyond what is expected by providing what is truly needed by each individual student to excel."

"Lin was the first person to help me, personally, raise the bar for my own child. When he was in the 4th grade, Lin started talking about high school credits leading to graduation and college. It is very difficult to admit that, as a mother, I didn't think that was possible until she said it. She is a big reminder to me that words have a tremendous impact. And how fitting to have her be such an impact on helping my son to learn to communicate so that, someday, his world can also have a tremendous impact."



Lin Thorson, Teacher of the Year

Lin Thorson Acceptance Speech

“Thank you President Peggy Johnson and The Arc, Upper Valley directors and staff for this award. The recognition you give to those in the field of education is absolutely terrific!”

How cool, that The Arc, Upper Valley was formed in 1955 by a group of parents who were concerned about the lack of educational opportunities for children. It is because of this movement that eventually special education classes became a regular part of all school systems.”

“To date, your movement has grown into virtually defining North Dakota’s community services and supports for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.”

“Thank you, The Arc Upper Valley, for your work over 60 years to improve education. I believe the true secret in education is respect for the student. Your work as advocates has helped communities see and understand what respect looks like.”

“I want to thank parents, siblings and family members tonight, who continue to strive to create a future where everyone has opportunities.”

“I also want to thank two women that have had a great impact in many lives including my own, Jalene Suda and Janice Kern. Like many here, these two women are torch

bearers for making the world better because they know the word “ability” in disability.”

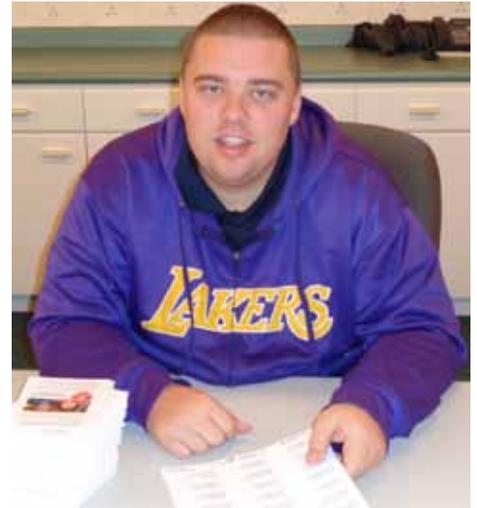
“Tonight, I invited my friend and co-special education teacher, Judy Sorbo, to be here. She and I began teaching at the end of the 1970’s. It was a time when school’s special education departments looked quite different than they do today!”

“In the beginning our classrooms were in places like the teacher’s lounge, boiler rooms, hallways, kitchens, lunch rooms and even a principal’s office. These spots were only available when someone else didn’t require their use for important things like a cup of coffee and a smoke.”

“Look at what your advocacy has done! It is the reason I am grateful to receive this award as it is an opportunity to thank you for the honor you have given not only me, but to others like me who find it a great privilege to teach children.”

“By the way, five years ago after changes were made in special education units, I was assigned to teach at Century Elementary School in Grafton. I was joining another speech therapist who recently graduated from UND to serve Century Elementary as well. In choosing our caseloads, I asked the principal to assign me all the hard parents. Guess whose names were at the top of that list - Jalene Suda and Janice Kern. Kudos to them! Their advocacy is well documented!”

Volunteer Spotlight



There’s a new face in The Arc, Upper Valley’s office these days.

Josh Kvidt is volunteering part-time with our organization to gain non-profit experience and to build his resume.

Josh has a Bachelor of Arts in Communication from the University of North Dakota with a certificate in Nonprofit Leadership.

Most recently, he worked on the Giving Hearts Day campaign, assisting with the production of marketing materials and coordinating the mass mailing.

He will continue to assist with upcoming events and work with various staff members to learn more about each position and how it functions within the organization.

Josh’s hobbies include interests in music, writing, movies, hockey and golf.



2500 Demers Ave Grand Forks ND 58201

Coming Soon... Enhanced Member Benefits!

Enhanced Benefits

The Arc, Upper Valley will kick off a membership campaign on April 1st, including enhanced benefits for members.

In addition to representation in local, state and national policy forums; and stipends and scholarships to attend selected educational conferences and events, members can expect some new benefits, including discounts in The Arc Thrift Store and True Colors when members show their membership card, and access to special "members only" sales events.

Join Us

Most importantly, you will be pledging your support for all people in your community with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Watch for more details, coming soon!

The Importance of Membership

Whether you are an individual with a disability, a self-advocate, a parent or family member of someone with a disability, a volunteer or staff member of The Arc or another organization, membership in The Arc provides a sense of purpose and belonging.

As a member of The Arc, you will have access to indispensable information and resources and the opportunity to *Be Part of the Progress* for people with disabilities and their families.

Strength in Numbers

Elected officials listen when The Arc speaks on your behalf. As a member, you will help make positive changes in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities by strengthening The Arc's voice at the legislature.