

ASPIRE!

"Labels can only confine. Aspire to be undefinable."

- Colin Wright

A publication of United Disability Services

FALL 2018



**Andrew's
Winning Smile &
Positive Attitude:
PRICELESS**



The Sky is the Limit

A Message from Brian Thomas,
UDS President/CEO

As I write this, I am in my eighth week among the staff and the individuals we serve at UDS. Before coming here, I spent four decades at the AAA Akron Auto Club, having worked there since high school. I experienced serving individuals with developmental disabilities for many years at a summer recreation program, and my family has quite an extensive legacy as advocates and service providers. But for all intents and purposes, I am new to the field.

Many aspects of general management are similar from one organization to the next, regardless of size or industry. There are always matters of governance, operations, finances, human resources and physical infrastructure to deal with. I feel well prepared to lead UDS in these matters, especially working side-by-side with a phenomenal leadership team.

Additionally, having served on the UDS Board of Directors for nearly fifteen years, I was familiar with our mission, our programs, and the challenges we face. Without exception, I have

always identified UDS as one of the best-run organizations I've been involved with, thanks to a superior management team, staff and board. It is such a great privilege to now be immersed as the new CEO.

In recent weeks, I have frequently been asked if there are any "surprises" in my new job, in light of my familiarity with UDS. My answer is this: As I visit with the people served and with the staff members in our program areas each day, the magnitude of the work being done, and the compassionate care delivered by the staff, are affirming and energizing beyond my expectations.

**"I'm grateful
beyond words
for the trust that
is placed in me."**

It's one thing to take an agency tour; I had been on many in the past, and I encourage anyone who is interested to do so. But to be here daily, and to take in just how much meaningful service is happening at every one of our locations, and to feel the impact it has on the lives of the individuals we serve, I can't help but be in awe of our direct care staff and their commitment to our mission.

I mentioned that we have challenges. The most pressing issues right now include instability of some key funding sources, as well as staffing shortages. We will always endeavor to work through challenges with dedication to the mission, and putting people first.

Howard Taylor spent more than 31 years in leadership at UDS, and is a highly respected leader in the community. I congratulate Howard with immense admiration, and wish him a most fulfilling retirement. As I went through the process of seeking to follow in Howard's footsteps, I strived to convince the UDS board that I would hold myself to the following five principles if given that opportunity:

Remain person-centered.
We do not serve "populations."
We serve individuals.

Defend the core. Our core competencies of adult services and transportation form the foundation upon which we can support social enterprises, services to youth, and all of the other great things UDS does.

Leverage the opportunities of change.
Change can be daunting and uncertain, but opportunity always lies within.

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Renaissance Man

He Works, Plays, Rides, Socializes and Serves with a Smile

Andrew's radiant smile is infectious and he spreads happiness wherever he goes. With bubbly enthusiasm he greets nearly everyone with a wave, a handshake or a high five. If you're lucky, you might get all three.

Teamwork

At UDS, Andrew's interests and abilities have guided his participation in a variety of programs allowing him every opportunity to reach his potential. Transportation Services provides him with a daily ride to and from our Firestone Park location where he splits his time between Vocational Services (meaningful employment) and SociAbilities (social/recreational program). He is also transported to medical appointments since he is eligible for NETS (Non-Emergency Transportation Services). An avid sports fan, he's a member of UDS' All-Star Training Club where he participates in flag football, cross country, winter bowling and coach pitch/kickball. He regularly competes with his ATC teammates at Special Olympics as well.

His sister Sharon Morris says, "I can't say enough about the staff of UDS and their kindness. I experience such goodness there and they treat Andrew with respect and have genuine concern for him." Since Andrew is involved in multiple programs, representatives from every program are involved in his team meetings. Sharon adds, "I feel like he is the only consumer they all work with, and I know that's not true, but his specific needs are very important to all of them. I get the sense that they all love my brother."

Early Years

Andrew faced some challenges when he was young but his parents focused on his potential and always encouraged him. Faith was an integral part of their home and his positive spirit can be attributed to the love and support he received, and continues to receive, from his family.

Shared Living

His parents are no longer living and he now shares a home with Rich Williams, a UDS shared living provider, who has been a longtime friend of Bob and Sharon Morris. Andrew enjoys living with Rich. They're very active at church and in the community. UDS Residential Program Supervisor Antalene Hunter says, "With work, church, time spent with family and ATC sports, among other things, Andrew has a jam-packed schedule and is very well-known and loved in the community."

Summit DD Service Support Administrator Heather Turek has

worked with Andrew since 2007 and says, "Andrew loves talking sports, spending time with his family and helping others. He is also very social and motivated, always wanting to work harder to accomplish his goals." UDS staff members have worked closely with Summit DD, Andrew and his family to create a life plan tailored specifically to his skills, interests and needs. He has embraced the diverse programs offered by UDS and everyone works together as a cohesive unit to help him be all that he can be.

For more information about programs offered by UDS call 330-762-9755 or visit online at udsakron.org.



Andrew is a good first baseman and is pictured here after winning a medal in ATC coach pitch/kickball. He is also pictured at work with UDS employee Patty Kinney and at church where he proudly serves as an usher who greets people and gives them a song book.

Art Award Established in Editor's Honor

Kaleidoscope is a publication of UDS that explores the experience of disability through literature and the fine arts. The international, award-winning publication has been a labor of love for Editor-in-chief Gail Willmott for 36 years but in August of this year, she decided it was time to retire.

In recognition of her passion for the arts and her dedication to writers and artists with disabilities, the agency has established The Gail Willmott Art Award in her honor. A piece of art, created by a person with a disability, will be purchased annually and added to the collection at UDS for the public to enjoy.

The first piece of artwork has been purchased and was unveiled at Willmott's retirement party. *Italia Spectra!* is a canvas print of a stunning, brightly-colored scene painted by artist Catherine



Catherine Bennett, *Italia Spectra!*, 2008, watercolor, 16" x 20"

Bennett who was featured in Issue 64 of *Kaleidoscope*. Catherine has Parkinson's disease and says, "It is important to support artists with disabilities because we are challenged to create art and the support gives us the inspiration to drive forward." The artwork will hang next to the first floor eleva-

tor at the main office. As a new piece of work is purchased it will be featured in this location and the former piece will be moved to another part of the building.

You can see the most current issue of *Kaleidoscope*, as well as past issues, at KaleidoscopeOnline.org.

A New Chapter Begins

The staff of *Kaleidoscope* is pleased to welcome new Editor-in-chief Debra Johanyak. She holds a PhD in English and is a freelance writer and editor living in north-east Ohio. In addition to her memoir *Behind the Veil* (University of Akron Press, 2007) and other books, her most recent is *Say What You Really Mean* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014). Johanyak's articles appear in publications like *Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education*, and she has published literary fiction as well as nonfiction. Her series of community dramas "In the Company of Extraordinary Women" (2009-2012) to commemorate Women's History Month featured women of local historic prominence and were presented at Hower House.



Join the worldwide
#GIVING
TUESDAY

movement on
Tuesday, November 27

*Stay tuned
for more information
on how you can
help support UDS
on this global
day of giving.*

Welty Lays Building Blocks to Success

Everyone who enters Welty Building Company can expect a warm welcome and a piping hot cup of fresh coffee made by Holly. Hired in May of this year as an office assistant, Holly is responsible for preparing conference rooms for meetings, stocking the kitchen and making coffee so guests and employees can enjoy snacks and beverages throughout the day. In addition to these duties, she also does

her high school graduation and transition into the job field. Holly says, "I've been through a lot, but I'm stronger because of it."

UDS Employment Specialist Cheryl Scribbs first began working with Holly in January of this year. Scribbs became aware of Holly's strengths and could really tell she was passionate about finding a job. Holly became slightly frustrated with her search after a few unsuccessful inter-

views, but stayed on track and remained persistent in finding the right job. The job search is hard for anyone, let alone people who have barriers to employment to overcome.

Holly's mom, Tracy, said, "UDS was just so helpful as a whole in bridging that gap for us."

The pieces fell together when Summit DD reached out to UDS with Welty's request. After her first interview, Holly said she stood in the parking lot looking up at the numbers on the building and she knew this was it—she finally found her perfect fit.

Flach says she was not prepared for how much hiring Holly would affect her personally. "Holly and the other office assistant bring an energy to the

company we wouldn't have otherwise. So many people take what they do every day for granted. These employees come in so happy, so cheerful, so thankful for the job that they have, it's humbling." Holly says getting this job at Welty has been an answer to a prayer and she couldn't imagine working anywhere else. Flach says, "We couldn't imagine our office without our assistants. They make our days!"

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Held each October, NDEAM aims to educate about disability employment issues and celebrate the many and varied contributions of America's workers with disabilities. Contact Community Employment Services by calling 330-762-9755 or email info@udsakron.org to find out how we can help you support the employment of individuals with disabilities every month of the year.



Holly is ready to greet clients with a smile (above) and pictured here with Kathy Flach (left) and Cheryl Scribbs (right).

filing when needed and is eager to do anything else asked of her. "Not a day goes by that Holly isn't in my doorway asking if there's anything else she can do," Welty Office Manager Kathy Flach says.

Earlier this year, Welty's Executive Team approached Flach about creating a position for people with disabilities. She never hesitated and saw the potential in this new opportunity.

Finding the Perfect Fit

Holly and her family were met with several obstacles following



July 28, 2018
3-on-3 Basketball Tournament
LeBron James Arena
5 Divisions
52 Teams
\$55,000
to support inclusive sports
Thank you!

United Disability Services

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701 S. Main St.
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1275 Sweitzer Ave.
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Kent, OH 44240
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Twinsburg**
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Twinsburg, OH 44087
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Taste Buds
264 S. Arlington St.
Akron, OH 44306
330-379-1873

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The Sky is the Limit continued

Be unwavering stewards of the agency. The reputation, brand, and outcomes are the result of quality leadership and stewardship. UDS is entrusted to our care.

Be thought-leaders in our field.

UDS has a reputation for new ideas and new programs. When it comes to thinking about how else we might serve individuals, the sky is the limit.

These principles reflect what I see as traits and values that made Gary Knuth and Howard Taylor so successful in leading UDS in the past, and they are the standards by which I intend to lead the organization going forward.

I am pleased and humbled to have this opportunity, and I'm grateful beyond words for the trust that is placed in me. Have a wonderful fall, and thank you for your support.

Brian

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The mission of UDS is to support people with disabilities and their caregivers by providing the highest quality, client-focused programs and services.

UDS is a non-for-profit organization [501(c)(3)] with programs accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF).

Amanda Leffler, chairperson
Brian Thomas, president/CEO
Lisa Armstrong, director of communications
Sandy Palmer, editor
Jayme Romanchuk, staff writer

A Unique Shopping Experience Downtown

If you haven't visited the Northside Marketplace in Akron yet, it is definitely worth the trip. You'll find an eclectic mix of local businesses in a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere. Visitors are invited to look around, sit for a while and enjoy the culinary options in the lounge where you can hang out with friends, and maybe even make a few new friends. Oh, and let's not forget—SHOP! The Marketplace is "an urban market with a focus on social interaction, local businesses and grass roots artisans." Supported by the Knight Foundation, it provides an opportunity for vendors to increase exposure, grow their business and connect with others in the community.

Earlier this year, Buckeye Baskets became one of 60 vendors at the Marketplace. We sold an Ohio Sunrise basket within the first two hours of opening the space and our new Akron mugs have been our best seller. We are excited to be a part of this new, thriving retail community that promotes a Shop Akron movement.

Northside Marketplace is located at 21 Furnace Street, near Luigi's Restaurant. Stop by and take a peek at this vibrant, unique space the next time you are in the neighborhood.

The holidays are right around the corner. In addition to baskets available at Northside Marketplace, we have some great options for all of your personal and corporate gift-giving needs. Call 330-379-3341 or visit:

www.BuckeyeBaskets.com

The best seller at the Northside Marketplace is our Akron mug. Variations include products from Berardi's Fresh Roast, Harry London, Hartville Chocolate Factory and Peanut Shoppe of Akron.



Contents may vary based on availability