

# Stories of Success

We celebrate our employees overcoming barriers to not only work but live more independently, and to exercise their talents in all areas of their lives.

In this issue of The Communicator, you will see a letter from the parents of Matthew Hartzell, and one from Matthew himself. As well, you will read of the success of Jim McKenzie.

“Our family offers heartfelt thanks to **Brenda Harter**, and PRIDE Industries for the incredible transformation of our son Matthew Hartzell. He has, over the past year, gone from an often silly but good natured, immature, hard worker to a more mature, self confident, hard working employee who is expanding his horizons daily both at work and with his new formed friendships!

“Hey, Mom! Just trust me, and I can do anything”

These are the sweetest words a mom could ever hope to hear, made sweeter for the journey we’ve all made over the past year. Matthew, age 20, was calling me the evening of June 30, 2009 through his “bluetooth” to let me know he was on his way home from his longest solo driving experience on the freeway since getting his driver’s license in May. This experience - the most recent of many milestones this last year, wouldn’t have been possible had we not had the guidance, coaching and tremendous resources of PRIDE Industries, and the belief by Brenda Harter, Job Developer ‘that we have to introduce the world to Matt!’

Matthew attended special education classes for the developmentally delayed/communicatively challenged most of his school life. His verbal and cognitive skills were challenged, and, combined with ADHD and about a three year lag in maturity, we’d been counseled that he’d probably never focus enough to drive, and would need to depend on public transit - a tough call for a rural setting.

Matthew has been working since he was 16 when he started sign walking to save for a school trip. He eventually got a full time job as a dishwasher/food server at a local assisted living facility. While a hard worker, and good natured, he would get caught up in the moment of camaraderie and horseplay with fellow kitchen workers, and too often didn’t know when to draw the line. He got written up several times for inappropriate business behavior, insubordination, and excessive horseplay. He finally lost his job June 2008.

On July 23, 2008, Steve Cowles, Department of Rehabilitation, set up a meeting with Brenda Harter, Job Developer for PRIDE Industries in Placerville, California, and that was the beginning of a whole new direction for Matthew. At that first meeting, something clicked between Brenda and Matthew - they say kindred spirits - and despite Matt’s monosyllabic answers, and “Mama Bear” answering too much, Steve and Brenda saw Matt’s potential. They felt with hard work from all, Matt would become a welcome member in the local workforce, gain self-confidence and maturity, learn how to

“Matthew  
now  
has a  
great job”

drive, and work towards more self-reliance and independence.

And work they did! Over the next nine months, Brenda spent many hours testing Matt for strengths/weaknesses, role playing work and social settings, improving his communication skills, and practicing proper social and work etiquette techniques. He learned how to better complete forms, how to dress for interviews, and make himself noticed in a positive way so the interviewers would know they’d be lucky to hire Matt. She helped channel his great energy, hone his work ethic, and build self-confidence. He did learn more socially acceptable behavior (most of the time - can’t completely repress his spontaneity and positive nature!), and started building new friendships.

Brenda [who started as] Matt’s job developer, became his main job coach - and his friend. She even helped Mama Bear adjust to the emerging young man her “baby” was becoming. When the time came for Matt to take his driving test, [Brenda] came to the DMV for support - mostly for me! Confident that he would pass his test (he got 100%), she arranged a congratulatory ice cream party at the fair grounds for Matt attended by the other PRIDE job coaches he’d worked with, and some of his coworkers and friends from PRIDE.

Matthew now has a great job as a Steward at Red Hawk Casino - where they do their best to burn off his tremendous energy. His manager Patrick has been very supportive of PRIDE and their placements/coaching process for employees. From day one, Patrick has worked with Matt to show him exactly what is expected, better ways to accomplish tasks, and how to be a team player. He has become a friend and mentor for Matt, and his constructive suggestions and compliments have encouraged Matt’s continued growth and development of self-confidence.

At a recent company picnic, my face hurt from smiling so much when managers and fellow employees came up to tell us what a hard worker Matt is, how he helps others outside the department when he can, and how he “lights up” and energizes an area when he shows up. When he comes home to say he’s been “written up”, unlike last year, it now means his fellow employees have nominated him for Ace Of Hearts - Employee of the Month (twice in eight months.)

Brenda’s mantra, which I heard in those sweet words above, “You can do anything you put your mind to” has resonated with Matt - What a year we’ve had - and it’s only going to get better for Matt- thanks to Brenda, and PRIDE Industries! Bigger and bigger circles!”

*Sandy and Bill Chickering*



*Above: Matt (right) and his Manager, Patrick (left), at Red Hawk Casino*

“One of the best things that happened to me this last year is Steve Cowles from Department of Rehabilitation - he’s the one [who] arranged the meeting with **Brenda** at PRIDE, and Dave Coyne to teach me to drive. The meeting with Brenda was great - we hit it off and each day we got together was an adventure -a learning experience. Being around Brenda is like seeing a reflection of me - we’re so much alike, we get along great.

**Brenda, Cindy [Schiafone]** and the other job coaches, - they all really looked out for me - they were there when I needed them.

If it wasn’t for Brenda, Steve, Cindy and all the coaches, I wouldn’t be having a good job career and especially a great boss - because of them I have all of this right here - right now.

My thanks to all of them [who] supported me, including [my] family. And for those who are having trouble keeping or getting a job, I recommend they find someone like Steve at DOR and Brenda at PRIDE, and they will help you get through the tough times and get a job. They will help the people [who] are hiring now to pick you first because of PRIDE’s training and support.”

*Matthew Hartzell*

**Jim McKenzie** has been working at Long’s (CVS Pharmacy) for [some] 16 years with a little help from his Supported Employment Job Coaching and his Independent Living Skills (ILS) instructors through PRIDE Industries. Jim has autism, and change can be a big challenge for him. He’s lived in his own apartment for four years. One of his new personal skills is making turkey chili - and to be really GOOD

chili, one needs good tools.

So, Jim purchased a food chopper/dicer, at which he has become very proficient!

He has also learned how to interact more effectively socially by practicing with

his ILS instructor and his Circle of Friends group. With his new passion for cooking and his developing interaction skills, Jim recently hosted his first party, inviting 15 – 20 people. Jim’s living room was packed with friends, and he had plenty of chili on-hand. He prepared fruit and vegetable platters, which he arranged beautifully by himself. Everyone had a grand time, and Jim had a huge smile on his face. Jim’s goals for this year include having another house party in the autumn, and to continue to use his computer to use the internet to view outer space, and the NASA Space Program.

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