

Upcoming Events

Northwest Center Networking Open House: 5/28

You know Northwest Center as the company with the big blue trucks. But did you know that we also own 14 businesses and have a geographic reach as far as Portland and Spokane? This is your opportunity to fully understand the size and scope of Northwest Center.

We are a vast organization; we operate a commercial laundry, provide janitorial and landscaping services, manage three local swimming pools, run a catering business, oversee an auto sales lot and own a shredding company.

We will be featuring Bill Krueger as our speaker and the group will also hear from business leaders from Starbucks, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Sustainable Group.

Join us for this event on Thursday, May 28 from 5:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at Northwest Center. For more information, contact Christie Cotterill at 206-378-6379.

April Information Session on Guardianship: 4/22

Northwest Center offers regular information sessions focused around topics of interest to those we serve. At the April session, we will address the basics of guardianship for your loved one with a disability. Our panel will include experts that specialize in handling guardianship questions and issues.

We hope you will join us on Wednesday, April 22 from 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the High Point Library (3411 SW Raymond Street, Seattle, WA 98126). To RSVP, contact Erika Van Merr at 206-378-6389.



Save a tree!

You can receive this newsletter electronically; just visit our website at www.nwcenter.org to sign up!



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Read about Liz's skiing triumph at the Special Olympics!



April 2009



Client Spotlight On... Liz!

It seems like Liz always has a smile on her face. She especially looks forward to going to her job at Value Village, and has been sharing her positive attitude with the staff and customers there for four years. But her smile grows even larger when she talks about her after-work passion: skiing. Liz learned to ski when she was 11 years old and participates in the Downhill, Slalom and Giant Slalom events in the Special Olympics. During the Washington winter games a few weeks ago, she was awarded a silver and gold medal in skiing competitions—which brings her lifetime medals count to almost 40!

Liz says she felt happy when she got her medals. She loves skiing and being outdoors in the winter, and an added bonus is having her brother coach her skiing team, the Cascade Ridge Racers. For 15 years, she's been a regular at the Special Olympics—and judging by her enthusiasm, it's likely to be 15 more. Congratulations to Liz for both her athletic and professional achievements!

A Word from President & CEO Tom Everill

Despite the weakened economy, Northwest Center's social enterprises are experiencing some positive changes. Social enterprises are businesses that we own and operate in order to provide an income stream for our programs—and they also offer valuable training opportunities and jobs for people with disabilities.

One of our newest ventures is a catering business called Seattle Fresh. Starting this month, Seattle Fresh will be providing breakfast and lunch service with two launch customers. There's significant growth potential for this businesses, which offers a great menu selection and—speaking from experience—some particularly tasty meals.

More news: Our laundry and dry cleaning enterprise (Puget Sound Laundry Service) is negotiating with a large regional hospital to provide their laundry service—representing a 30% increase in revenue for our laundry. And although we no longer operate one of our community pools (St. Edward State Park), we're still serving our loyal customers at the nearby Northshore Pool. We continue to operate three public pools, all of which offer customized classes for kids and adults with disabilities.

Children’s Program Staffer Reflects on Decades at Northwest Center

When you’re a childcare provider and you realize the first infants you served are now grown adults, you start reflecting on your experiences. That’s why we recently checked in with Donna Starkey about her 21 years at Northwest Center’s children’s program....

Q: How did you get into the childcare field?

A: I have five kids of my own, and when my youngest was eight years old, I started looking for a job outside the home. I had no idea what I wanted to do—just that I had five kids to support. I went to Childhaven and worked in their first infant room; I loved working with children and helping parents. And I couldn’t believe I could actually earn money doing something I loved to do! After 10 years, I moved to a position at Northwest Center and I found home.

Q: Why have you stayed at Northwest Center?

A: The mission here. When I started, I hadn’t had any contact with kids who have special needs. So I asked my co-teacher what to do with special needs kids when it comes to things like art projects, and she told me, ‘They’re just kids.’ I took it from there and always tried to see how far we could go with the potential of the kids. It’s all about inclusion and getting to them when they’re young. Helping kids with special needs get to their full potential, as well as typically developing kids. That’s the whole model.

Q: Can you recall a particularly exciting moment?

A: The amazing thing is seeing a child who has worked hard experience a great triumph. A few years ago, there was a little girl in my classroom who needed extra help



learning to sit up and crawl. Now she’s a preschooler—and every time I see her walking up and down the halls, I get goose bumps.

Q: What else do you enjoy?

A: I enjoy all the kids, and the parents are also great. They’re wonderful and supportive. They realize it’s not just fun and games; we don’t just play all day long. This is an important part of the kids’ lives. Every day, the parents come in thankful and grateful, and they teach their kids to be appreciative, too. 🌱

Staff Learn Sign Language to Communicate with Clients and Colleagues

In Northwest Center’s adult services program, staff and clients are finding new ways to communicate. It started a few years ago when Northwest Center hired a staff member who is deaf. That person encouraged and taught colleagues who were interested in sign language—and since then, several other staff members have taken classes and added American Sign Language to their skills set. Now there are three staff members who are deaf working in adult services, and several more who participate in monthly lunches where all conversation occurs via sign language.

An exciting benefit has been the impact on clients, the adults with disabilities who receive job training and placement services at Northwest Center. The more staff used sign language, the more they realized clients were responding to that form of communication. Clients who had been largely nonverbal started to take unprecedented strides as they picked up signs. And clients who *are* able to communicate verbally have also shown an interest, oftentimes because they learned signs from a hearing-impaired family member or roommate.



The end result has been a snowball effect. Staff who previously relied on spoken words or pictures to communicate with clients now have another option. Clients who were reserved or nonverbal have found a way to grow and express themselves. The businesses that employ clients are even learning signs, in order to meet people where they’re at. And clients are benefiting from seeing role models who are successfully living with a disability. Most importantly, *everyone* has learned that barriers often aren’t as big as they seem. 🌱



Sponsor Our Golden Hearts Luncheon

Did you know that Northwest Center was started as part of the civil rights movement? Our founders refused to accept that their children were treated as less important than other children. Today, we still struggle to obtain equal rights for people with disabilities.

We invite you to attend our 10th annual luncheon on September 25. This is our only fundraising event of the year and we need to raise \$150,000 to address the critical needs facing kids and adults with developmental disabilities. The key to achieving this goal is securing sponsors who share a commitment to this mission and the people in this community that need our help.

If you are interested in being a sponsor, contact Christie Cotterill at 206-378-6379 or ccotterill@nwcenter.org. See you in September! 🌱

Northwest Center Workers Are Rewarded for an Outstanding Job

Two teams of employees from one of our biggest enterprises, Integrated Facility Services, were recognized recently for their exceptional work. Our janitorial and grounds crews take pride in maintaining the Federal Center South property, and their dedication paid off when a group of visitors toured the site in February.

Property Manager Richard Hall says representatives from the Department of Veterans Affairs were on site to discuss space rental. At the end, they said the inside and outside appearance of the building was better than all the others they had walked through—and they made an on-the-spot commitment to become tenants. Richard gave full credit to the Northwest Center employees who do things like polish the floors, empty wastebaskets, steam carpets, set up rooms, maintain garden beds, prune trees, salt sidewalks and plow snow.

Richard was so pleased that he brought in John Frisk from NISH, which oversees this “Ability One” contract. The two held a ceremony, at which they personally presented awards to every employee who services the site. Congratulations goes out to all parties—this is the kind of partnership we strive for! 🌱



Partner Profile: Sustainable Group

Nothing beats doing good things for the community *and* the earth! That’s exactly the approach Northwest Center partner Sustainable Group is taking. Sustainable Group is in the business of creating environmentally-responsible office products, and we’re in the businesses of packing them up!

Northwest Center clients prepare and box items like binders, CD sleeves, and divider tabs for distribution—using earth-friendly boxes and tape, of course! People with all types of disabilities are able to participate in Sustainable Group’s projects, so dozens of adults have learned skills related to organizing, packaging, time management and quality assurance.

This relationship started two years ago and has grown exponentially. With society’s focus on “going green” and Sustainable Group’s great prices, it’s poised for even more growth in the future. We’re glad Sustainable Group is making a better binder—and even more glad to be their partner! 🌱

