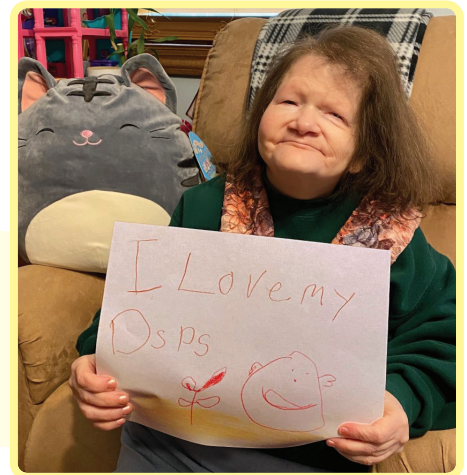


Being a hero is being there – being there every day – being there because someone depends on you. They need you. And so you are there. You are there when they get up and when they go to bed ... for breakfast and dinner ... for birthdays and holidays and just ordinary days ... when they go to work and when they come home ... when they go to the movies or out to eat ... or to the dentist or doctor. You are there when they set goals and meet those goals. You applaud their successes, support their dreams. You are the one who picks them up when they fall. You put them first ... always first. (from Heroes YouTube video)

The words on the sign created by Mindy Husmann (Pepper Hill) say it all when it comes to what DSPs mean to the people they serve.



We get knocked down – with heroes we get up even stronger

by Tom Weaver, Executive Director

There's a sign on the front door of our administrative office on Needmore Road and on the doors of some of our other locations with just three words that say it all. **HEROES WORK HERE**. Since 2019 we've been knocked down, one punch after another, from tornadoes to a pandemic, we've just about had it all. And now the summer of 2020 is too quickly coming to an end and fall is inching closer and we're still fighting the good fight.

Just like the rest of the world, when COVID-19 hit us, we pulled in, closed down, isolated and began slow and careful steps to get back to where we had been. We joined all those thousands of families in mourning as we faced the death of a long-time extended family member, Richard Boze. His roommates and staff were quarantined even as we continue to come to grips with a loss that has truly knocked us down.

We know this latest storm, this pandemic, continues all around us. We are committed to working with our clients, staff, families, day programs and community for as long as it takes to make the best decisions possible as we go forward, with safety and health always our priority.



Creativity abounds in the variety of arts and crafts going on in our homes throughout the seven counties we serve, staying at home but having a lot of fun. One example is the creativity of clients in making decorative labels of appreciation to go on bottles of hand lotion they presented to their staff. There were also labels for decorative candles – with the message 'always shining bright for clients and staff', and candy jar labels saying 'we need S'mores staff like you.'

And yet, when you have heroes surrounding you, there is always good news. The human spirit can and does persevere in the face of hardship and change. It's been remarkable to watch as our staff and clients every day find ways to make lemonade out of the avalanche of lemons that have bombarded us. We are afraid of this unseen virus, and rightfully so. It makes us cautious. At the same time, we must determine 'reasonable risk' in continuing to have quality of life for those we serve. It's a balancing act every day. It's also an opportunity every day for the power of creativity. That's something we are seeing every day from our great team of DSPs, management and administrative staff.

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Remembering Roger

Roger Bronstetter completed his struggle against cancer in May at the age of 70, passing peacefully at his home in Springfield, surrounded by Karen, his wife of 20 years, and his devoted Choices' staff. Karen and Roger met while they both worked at TAC Industries in Springfield. With the support of staff, they were able to purchase and maintain their own home.

He was part of our extended Choices family for seven years, which included his participation in our Adult Day Services program in Clark County for the past five years.

It was the support of staff who saw both of them through all that was to follow once he was diagnosed with cancer. They helped Karen understand and prepare for what would happen with Roger's illness and his eventual passing, which included her attending counseling. She is now doing well, with continuing support from staff and with all the memories that come with 20 years of a loving marriage.

She is comforted by some of her favorite memories of her husband, like how much he loved going to Dayton Dragons games and how he often told anyone who would listen that they (*the Dragons*) wanted to hire him as their bat boy. That sense of fun was part of everything he did,

from going to the movies, fairs, amusement parks and the circus. He really liked hamburgers and diet Sunkist and loved going out to eat at Applebee's.

In addition to his wife, Roger is survived by his brother Larry and a nephew. Missing him each day are his beloved dogs, Prince and Princess. As his life was drawing to a close, there was someone there beside him during the long night, one of his heroes, someone who would not leave his side, DSP Erin Nichols. In the ordinary and routine of living each day, she was there. In the final moments of a life well lived, it was her gentle touch and caring voice that brought comfort and bid him farewell.



Heroes – really true heroes

You put them first – always first. In the midst of the darkest storms and most destructive winds, you act for their own safety before your own. In the midst of a pandemic, you are there, keeping them safe, active and healthy at home. Sometimes you are there to sit by a bedside alone at night as someone you cared for takes his final breath. You are there so he does not die alone. (from DSP Heroes video.)

DSP (*Direct Support Professional*) Erin Nichols was the one sitting at Roger's bedside through the night so that he did not die alone. According to Program Administrator Diane Hayslip, Erin always went above and beyond caring for Roger and his wife Karen. "She worked often on her own time to make sure they were cared for in every way," says Diane. "She loves the Bronstetters like family. They call her Sis and her husband Richard (*also a DSP*) Bro," she continues. "Erin is a perfect example of a giving, loving and compassionate human being. In addition to caring for Roger and Karen, she was there to comfort other staff and to prepare them for his passing. They knew they could confide in her. She always made everyone feel better."

Diane also recognizes the other DSPs who stood by the Bronstetters as Roger's health declined. "Not a single one of them hesitated to step in and do everything they could so that he would be as comfortable as possible and to also help and support Karen." DSPs caring for Roger and Karen, in addition to Erin, are Lisa Borgens, Raven Brown, Cathy Campbell, Dan Crews, Ashley Henderson, Mattie Julian, Hayleigh Mollett, Richard Nichols, Marless Thompson and Laura Turner.

Heroes – really true heroes – are there in the darkness to hold your hand so that you do not die alone.

Remembering Richard

He survived the unimaginable in the years he spent in the state-operated institution at Gallipolis, gaining his freedom and dignity, finding home and family at Choices before becoming one of those lost to the COVID-19 pandemic, passing away at Miami Valley Hospital on July 31. Born in 1928, we would have been with him as he celebrated his 92nd birthday in August. He was the oldest of the men at our Burman home. Staff will tell you that he was also the neatest.

One of 16 siblings, he enjoyed his memories of his early days in Troy, Ohio, where he liked riding go carts and doing odd jobs, like washing cars and chopping wood. His staff remember how much he liked soda pop, preferring it to even lunch or dinner, so staff would good-heartedly remind him that he needed to eat his food as well. They remember how he liked taking rides in the van and how sometimes his mind would move faster than his walker and he would need to be reminded to slow down. He had no problem in telling staff what he didn't like.

He was one of those heroes with the strength to share their stories as part of the ***Lest We Forget*** historical archives, recording and preserving the history of those who were survivors of institutions. His smiling face can be seen in the pages of ***Home from Purgatory***, the book that is part of the ***Lest We Forget*** effort.

Perhaps no one had a longer history and deeper commitment to Richard than Program Director Danette Addison, who first met him while she was a Direct Support Professional. Following are some of her memories...

... Richard came to Choices in 1987. I had only been with Choices for eight months. He and his best friend Harry had come to Dayton after being released from Gallipolis.

They were preparing to move from a Salvation Army shelter where they lived for many years and move into apartments next to each other, where we would provide staff support.

After so many years of institutional living, Richard enjoyed the freedom his apartment gave him, but was also challenged by that freedom. He always began his day at 4:30 a.m. He had so much he had to learn at age 59, like getting groceries and preparing food. Just opening a can of food and heating it on the stove was a big step. Harry and Richard teamed up to manage all their new challenges, always appreciating their freedom and independence. They spent many days traveling around the city and finding new places to go.

After five years, he and Harry moved into an apartment together in east Dayton, where Renee Mills became their primary staff. Richard was always so appreciative of what we did to support him and he always let us know it.

We were alarmed when Harry died, thinking Richard would be lost, but we underestimated him. He became more independent and more his own person. He loved it when he moved to our Burman home. He came to



Continued on page 4



Remembering Lois

Lois Hays loved to make people laugh and no one enjoyed a good joke more than she did, especially when she was making funny faces to get reaction from staff or 'goosing' a team member unexpectedly. Those kinds of fun-loving moments are the ones staff are missing most following Lois' passing in May at the age of 71.

She was a member of our Choices' extended family for 37 years, living the last year in her own apartment at Pheasant Run Senior Living, enjoying her one on one staffing. She really liked the attention. Before moving to Pheasant Run, she lived in our Greencroft home.

She worked at MONCO at the Jergens Road Center, at ViaQuest and LCD, retiring just this past February. She was happiest when she was outdoors. She was a huge Disney fan, loved Mickey Mouse and watching Disney movies. She enjoyed having her nails done but didn't enjoy waiting for them to dry. She gave it her all each time she sang along to a song on YouTube.

She loved her family, including her brothers Dennis and Byron and other family and friends, as they loved her. They are thankful for the loving support that Choices' caring staff provided her.

Thirty acres and more

The Board of Choices In Community Living and Executive Director Tom Weaver announce the purchase of the former George C. Martin Funeral Home on Frederick Pike and its surrounding 30 acres. The purchase comes following the closing of the Martin Funeral Home, which is adjacent to the current Choices administrative offices at 1651 Needmore Road.

According to Tom, the purchase will allow expansion to meet current needs, as well as open doors for opportunities for new programs and services. “We’re really indebted to George for working with us to make this possible and for his generosity in making a major gift to us to help with the costs.” Prior to the onset of COVID-19 and its social distancing requirements, the current Needmore Road office was overflowing with administrative and management staff, all working in cramped spaces and sometimes sharing the same space. There is limited space for meetings and for staff training. Parking space for

staff and visitors is limited, with little to no safe parking for agency vans. One of the immediate benefits of the expanded property will be to meet some of the most urgent overcrowding concerns once staff are able to be work together safely.

Choices has grown significantly since its founding in 1985, now providing a range of services throughout southwest Ohio in Butler, Clark, Greene, Madison, Montgomery, Preble and Warren counties. Operating 65 vans, it also has one of the largest vehicle fleets in the area.

“The Board expects that this purchase will meet multiple purposes,” Tom continues. “We’re looking at enhancing and expanding our Adult Day Services to serve more people and this expansion will allow us to look at that option. We’ll certainly have conference and meeting space, significant parking, and room to spread out so our current staff can be more effective, as well as providing us some additional administrative space. We’ll continue to use our Needmore Road building as well.

Remembering Richard *continued from page 3*



From those early days together Danette continues her service as a Program Director, while Richard continued to enjoy special times, like birthday celebrations, with her.

adore Program Administrator Diann Reid and developed a close relationship with Fredina Jackson.

A soft-spoken and gentle man, he brought happiness to everyone he met because he enjoyed life and people. In my early days with him, he was mistrustful of everyone, including me. As the years unfolded, he learned who to trust and enjoy and that enjoyment in life gave off a warmth that touched everyone he met. Everyone loved Richard. Even in the hospital as he struggled with the virus that has taken so many lives I was told he was winking, smiling and waving at everyone caring for him.

“Have a good day. Have a nice evening. I hope to see you in my dreams.” That was how Richard spoke to everyone in that soft voice, barely above a whisper, filled with such a sweet and humble spirit, coming from such a small frame. He gave meaning to the words ‘aging gracefully.’ From those happy young days as part of a big family in Troy, to those dark days at Gallipolis, he came home to live a long and valued life. So many were the good days with Richard by our side, but not nearly enough. We are left to remember his smile and the kind and gentle voice. We hear it still ... *I hope to see you in my dreams.*

I’d also like to see us explore using the new location to establish a Southwest Ohio Regional Training Center to train Direct Support Professionals from not only our agency, but from agencies throughout this region. The complexity of the caseloads for DSPs continues to grow, requiring more in-depth and consistent training. A regional center would allow us as service providers to provide uniform training and more in-depth training. Currently, new staff receive initial training and then go right to work, with our management teams needing to continue training, along with their other duties. Freeing them up from that responsibility would add significantly to their availability to focus on clients/residents.”

Not overlooked in the planning are the expansive grounds (30 acres) around the facilities, which includes some already existing trails, thanks to George Martin’s efforts over the years. New outdoor recreational options will be reviewed in planning for use of the grounds.

“With the continual stress of COVID-19 demanding so much of our time and energy, this purchase gives us all something to look forward to, something we can control, something that gives us hope for the future,” concludes Tom. “With a pandemic all around us, some might say this might not be a good time for change like this, but then again this just well might be the kind of change and hope we need right now.”

Celebrating the 70s

It's been a time of celebrating birthday milestones, reminding us that turning 70 (*or a little older*) is all about enjoying life, along with a party and a big slice of birthday cake.

Who doesn't just love Tim Powers? He felt that love from everyone around him as he recently celebrated his 76th birthday. Tim, who lives at our Garvin home, is lucky to be at the center of two families. He grew up as the third oldest of seven children. Five of his siblings still share time and a strong family bond with him. He is also surrounded by his extended family at Choices, which includes two roommates who have lived with him for over 20 years. Staff enjoy his sense of humor and the way he can let them know just what he wants, which has included them helping him take a memorable vacation in Tennessee in 2018. He's now shared with them (*hint – make it happen*) that he wants his next big adventure to be a cruise to the Bahamas.

He enjoys sitting at his workbench and 'building things.' His favorite treats, when not having birthday cake, are Tootsie Roll pops and bananas.



What is Donald Little's favorite day of the year? Despite the party and cake, it's not his birthday, even the birthday when he reached that milestone of 70 with a party at our Yorkshire home (*Clark County*.) His favorite day of the year is the one he looks forward to every year with great anticipation. It's Halloween. We've yet to find anyone who enjoys Halloween more than Donald, who lives in his own home in Springfield with his wife Margie. He and Margie are so thankful for the support of his staff who worked with them so they could plan for and then purchase their home.

It is in that home that Halloween is celebrated fully every October, including a 15-foot blow up dinosaur on the front lawn. Once the monster is taken down and stored away for another year, he keeps the spirit of the season by watching scary movies.

Michael Holmes' (*Endicott*) youthful face makes 70 look like the 'new 50.' The fact that COVID-19 meant he had to stay at home for his birthday party with his housemates and staff didn't stop him from having a great time. The chocolate cake with chocolate frosting and the 70 accompanying candles for him to blow out were just perfect.

Michael has been a part of our extended Choices' family since 1987. His birthday party confirmed his love of chocolate. He also likes movies, especially the scary ones and the ones that have a lot of action. He loves 'oldies' music, coloring and drawing. One of the most special times for him is when he is alone and quiet as he reads his Bible.



We get knocked down... *continued from page 1*

Our Adult Day programs are back, but on a limited basis. For the first few months we were providing 'activity baskets' to participants while they followed stay at home orders. We have resumed some services in our Fun-Fit program by reducing the number of participants from 10 or 12 down to two, and only doing a two-hour day. We always follow strict guidelines in wearing masks, social distancing and hand washing. Preferred daily activities are taking place, with trips to museums, parks and picnics.

Transportation services are now operating again, on a limited basis, to support individuals who do not live together to get them to their jobs and/or day programs. We limit the number of people together in a van and require each person wears a mask. Vans are thoroughly cleaned between trips.

The level of creativity from our residential teams has been extraordinary. The Woodridge ladies planted flowers all around their home. A garden was planted at our Lincoln Park home, one of many this year. There was a drive-by Easter Bunny at our Huntsview home that thrilled the ladies. And all those trips out in the community ... fishing at nearby lakes, going to the Sandusky Drive-Through Zoo, visits to parks ... so many park visits that we're now known by name at several of them. There have been movie nights in the back yard with popcorn and drinks, some shown on big screens, aka bed sheets. There was that special Day Spa at our Brantford home.

And then there are those DSPs who have made the decision to stay in a home



Artistic expressions, like this picture by Tim Hughes (Wenger home) have filled homes and even spread outside to chalk art created on driveways, along with making Mothers' Day cards, masks and more. There have been game nights galore ... Chinese checkers, Bingo, Pick Up Stix, cards – corn hole and bocce ball outside.



Not even the rain can stop a picnic once you have the idea. The men at our Endicott home just moved their planned picnic indoors when the rain came. Enjoying the change of pace are (l-r) Kevin Gutierrez, Michael Holmes, Leon Hamilton and Joe Daniel.

where someone is quarantined, staying for the entire quarantine time, not going home, with just one simple expression as to why, "I love them. They're family. I'll serve them through the quarantine period."

No words can begin to express the resiliency and strength of our clients during so many changes in their lives. No words can express the depth of appreciation to families, friends and donors, people like George Martin, while dealing with their own needs during a pandemic, still remembering us, still supporting us. No words can express how important our partnerships are with the Montgomery County Board of Developmental Disabilities, with organizations supporting us with grants, with Resident Home and Toward Independence and this amazing community that supports us all.



And did we mention food! We've been finding all kinds of ways to be creative with food, while still enjoying our favorites, like Jesse Stanley (Wenger home) cooking up dinner at the grill. There are cookouts and bonfires in back yards too many to mention, even cooking classes.



Don't sweat the small stuff

That's just one of the things Greg Gromosiak has learned from the people he has been serving for the past eight years in his role as lead Adult Day Services staff at our West Carrollton YMCA Fun-Fit program. "Working with clients means a lot to me," says one of our most dedicated team members, "they have taught me

to never take things for granted and to enjoy every day to the fullest. At the end of the day, whatever challenges I have are minor compared to what our clients face every day. They have truly been an inspiration in my life."

That sense of inspiration is just one of the things that motivates Greg to give so much of himself every day. According to Fun-Fit Program Director Nancy Viets "Greg is such an asset to our West Carrollton program. He is diligent and pays attention to details. He ensures that everyone is safe, having a good time, and that each person is treated with respect." Greg supervises Fun-Fit participants as they work out on various machines, walk the track, play basketball and swim, while focusing on life skills they can use in the community. "Some of our favorite things to do in the community are going to Cox Arboretum, walking at the Dayton Mall, or going to a park when the weather permits," shares Greg.

In addition to his scheduled work, Greg was one of the hard-working staff who volunteered each year for the Choices' Talent Show, something he did because he knew how much the clients enjoyed being front and center on stage.

We get knocked down... continued from page 6

We will never find words that can express how much we owe to our DSPs, our teams, for continuing our quality of life mission through all of this. There are these words from the DSP Heroes video we produced with Resident Home and Toward Independence as one measure of our recognition of their service, our appreciation of who they are as staff and as remarkable and inspiring people – they are our heroes!

Being a hero is being there, being there every day, being there because someone depends on you, because you are essential. You are essential every day. For those who are new in their journeys as DSPs, you are essential. For you who have watched those you serve grow older while you somehow remain the same, who have 20, 30 or even 40 years of service, you are essential. And yes, every day of every week of every year, you are heroes, really true heroes!

Greg has found a sense of family at Choices and everyone sees it, from those he serves, to those who see him in action. "Greg works with clients as if they are family," notes YMCA staff member Brandy Hudson. "He takes the time to understand them and thinks outside the box to make things fun." Fun-Fit participant Scott Patterson echoes those words. "Greg is my friend," he shares, "I like hanging out with him."

Greg agrees that his job is more than work. "The people I serve are part of my extended family," he says. "I'm close with each and every one of them. They call me quite often just to talk. Even people I no longer serve stay in touch. I love the job that I have!" Nancy notes that while Greg's skills and caring with individuals, families, providers and the community has led her to ask him to move up to a Program Manager position, he has declined her request, sharing that he likes it right where he is.

When not doing the work that means so much to him, he enjoys walking and being outdoors. He loves music and has played the guitar most of his life. He collects vintage beer-related items. And there is that one other important adventure in his life. He and Shelley Harman, who is Choices' HR Clerical/Compliance Specialist, have been a couple for several years. "We are finally tying the knot this September!"

Most fortunate is the man who has found where he is meant to be and who he is meant to be with. How fortunate for us that Greg Gromosiak has found that here with us, with Shelley by his side.



You are there when they set goals and when they meet those goals. Right by their sides, that's really important to Greg. Having not only a mentor and staff member but a friend like Greg right there beside you as you walk, that's what's really important to Fun-Fit participant Scott.

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Choices'
Voices



It was a younger and joyful Roger and Karen Bronstetter enjoying a past Valentine's Day, one of many special occasions that filled their 20-year marriage. Staff surround her now with unfaltering comfort and support, her heroes in a difficult time of change. Her heroes, there beside her now and into the future, holding her hand so that she does not grieve alone.



Being a hero is being there - being there every day - being there because someone depends on you - because you are essential. You are essential to your organization ... the organization that cannot fulfill its mission without you. You are essential to the families of those you serve. They look at you as their lifesavers, and you are that for them. You are essential to your community, helping us become open, accessible and integrated for all of our citizens. (from our DSP Heroes video.)