

# Opportunities

News and ideas for clients, friends and supporters of Opportunity Partners

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## My life, my work, my dreams

*Celebrating 10 years of city employment*

By Rodney Griffin

### My life

I am Rodney Griffin and I am 44 years old. I reside in my own apartment in New Hope. I have cerebral palsy, and because of this condition I use a motorized wheelchair to get around. I also use Metro Mobility to get from place to place. However, I have to plan four days ahead for an outing; I cannot be spontaneous in my decisions to go somewhere.

### My work

I was referred to Opportunity Partners in 1994 and began working on the work floor, where I tried out many jobs and took the opportunity to get my feet wet in the workforce. Opportunity Partners gave me a chance to grow from an assembly worker to a quality control worker at Data Recognition Corporation, where I was employed for two years.

Then I went back to Opportunity Partners for two years, until we learned of an opportunity as an image technician at the City of Minnetonka. I have worked for the city for 10 years now. My job involves scanning documents such as microfiche and paper. The City of Minnetonka is a great place to work because of all the people here. They accept me as a person first with a disability, but not the other way around. I celebrated my 10 years with a party.

Opportunity Partners has a good relationship with the companies that hire workers. For an example, if I had a problem communicating with the supervisor at the City of Minnetonka, the Opportunity Partners job coach would be a go-between with the City of Minnetonka and the employee to assist in keeping the employee satisfied with the position. They are very good with follow up for employees like me who have a disability. They have been following up with me in my position for the past 10 years.

I would like to encourage businesses to hire people with disabilities, so people have a chance to prove themselves to you and to your organization; I also would like to encourage businesses to create new positions within the organization for



Rodney recently celebrated 10 years of employment at the City of Minnetonka.

people with disabilities because we all have something to give to the world; we all have challenges to overcome.

### My dreams

I hope to find a meaningful relationship and to become a father someday. Just like my own dad was, I hope to become an accountable, father figure to someone else. I am interested in media design, to assist my web development status, photography to honor my aunt, business management, computer science, information technology, and psychology to assist people who would like meaningful relationships. I will be continuing my education by attending DeVry University this summer.

I enjoy attending public events in the cities of Minneapolis, Minnetonka and New Hope. I also enjoy photography, performing arts and listening and singing to '80s music.

*Note: Rodney and the City of Minnetonka have been chosen to be featured in a video about independent employment being produced by The Wallace Group for the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities. Another Opportunity Partners client, Bryce, who works for Kraus-Anderson Construction Company will also be highlighted.*

## Brain injury program expands, new autism service launches

Opportunity Partners has moved its West St. Paul TBI Metro Services office to a new location nearby. The change will result in expanded offerings for people with brain injury and program growth opportunities. Opportunity Partners is also using the space to launch a new, community-based program for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder as well as other disabilities.

The office, at 1869 S. Robert Street in West St. Paul, is less than a mile from Opportunity Partners' former brain injury office. That office closed when the new space opened.

**About Opportunity Partners' TBI Metro Services:** TBI Metro Services, which also has an office in Richfield, expects to expand its footprint in Dakota, Washington and Ramsey counties with the move. The relocation will also grow the brain injury program's employment training program with the addition of a classroom and a production area. In addition to training, TBI Metro Services offers community integration and inclusion, vocational services, and independent living skills for people who have survived brain injury.

Opportunity Partners currently serves nearly 60 people with brain injury out of the West St. Paul office.

**About Opportunity Partners' Autism program, Spectrum:** Sharing office space at the West St. Paul location is Opportunity Partners' new program for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder and other disabilities.



Licensed as a Day Training & Habilitation provider, Spectrum opened in July and will serve up to 14 individuals by the end of 2011 and 30 by late 2012.

The program is community-based, meaning participants will gain greater independence and employment skills by participating in community activities such as shopping and budgeting, accessing public transportation, volunteering, on-the-job training, and similar vocational activities.

An open house and ribbon-cutting ceremony is planned for September 15.



Dave Volz,  
Manager Anoka SILS &  
Audra Karnes,  
Manager Anoka DTH

# Q & A **Serving the north Metro**

*Managers Dave Volz and Audra Karnes oversee Opportunity Partners' Anoka County programs, based in Coon Rapids. They sat down recently to discuss the programs' growth and features.*

### What services does Opportunity Partners offer in Anoka County?

Our Coon Rapids office serves about 175 people. Services are provided not only at our office, but more often in the community, at worksites and in people's homes. In all, we have 70 people in our vocational/day program and 115 people in our residential programs. Some individuals are served in both programs. We have a total of 45 staff who are diverse, dedicated and talented.

### What are the strengths of these programs?

The size of our Coon Rapids office makes it an excellent choice for people looking for a smaller environment. It's also a great fit for people who enjoy community activities as we spend a lot of time accessing neighborhood resources in the north Metro – libraries, parks and shops. Our class offerings cover anything from fitness and cooking to online banking.

Our supported employment services offer a range of work opportunities. We are fortunate to have partnered with area businesses who embrace our mission by either hiring our clients directly or contracting with us for their labor needs. On any given day, we might have people packaging parts in our office and a team of workers cleaning a local government building. We can also provide employment supports in areas like job coaching and helping individuals look for work.

Our residential programs are all about helping people live as independently as possible. We have guided many individuals as they've transitioned from their parents' home to a community home or to their own apartment.

Opportunity Partners also provides most of the transportation in our Anoka County programs. Our amazing staff is always up to the task – we put about 15,000 miles on our company vans in one month transporting individuals to work and community activities in our day and residential programs.

### The program has grown significantly over the last few years. What do you attribute that to?

Opportunity Partners has an outstanding reputation, and we are known for our customized services and person-centered approach. The greatest compliment we can receive is when a family refers another family to us. The people we serve are our customers and we believe strongly in having open communication with them and providing them the opportunity to rate us in annual satisfaction surveys.

We have scheduled a number of events here to engage and involve the families we serve, and we are eager to expand our services to new participants. Our families have connections that have led to new job opportunities and inroads to other community resources we may not have had access to in the past.

### How can I learn more?

We would be happy to arrange a tour so you can meet our staff and see our programs first-hand. Give us a call at 763-717-2960 or 763-450-4423. You can also learn more at our Web site at [www.OpportunityPartners.org](http://www.OpportunityPartners.org).

**PEOPLE WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

## Sharing smiles through volunteerism

Carol, who is served through Opportunity Partners' Vocational and Residential programs, inspires all who know her.

Having overcome a serious medical issue 10 years ago, Carol knows how important it is to put her health first. That's why she set a goal to eat better and exercise, losing more than 40 pounds. Her healthier lifestyle has given her more energy to do the things she enjoys, including giving back to others.

She has volunteered for Courage Center since 2004, where she helps out every Friday morning. As people enter the facility, they are greeted by Carol's smiling face as she escorts them to appointments. "I enjoy the people I meet," she noted. "It's a place where I can use my abilities to help people." Carol has volunteered more than 1,000 hours for the organization.

She also carries that positive attitude to her job at a floral and garden center. Her strong work ethic and willingness to lend a hand motivate her coworkers to do the same. Thank you, Carol, for helping take the "dis" out of disability!



Volunteers Carol and Helen share some smiles while volunteering at Courage Center.

## Goin' to the dogs – class volunteering

A class from Opportunity Partners' Koch Campus spends Wednesday mornings going to the dogs, literally, at nonprofit organization PawPADs. Pawsitive Perspectives Assistance Dogs (PawPADs) is an assistance dog training center in Savage.



Opportunity Partners participants have volunteered at the organization for the last year, helping socialize and train dogs, preparing treats and cleaning the facility – building work skills in the process. Way to go for sharing community value through gifts of time and talent!

Barry Rupp helps socialize a dog in training at PawPADs as part of a volunteer activity.

## Opportunity Partners elects new Board members

Opportunity Partners has elected **Janet Shepherd** and **Edson Spencer Jr.**, to its Board of Directors. Janet is Program Specialist/Nutritionist at the Minnesota Department of Education. Ed is Chairman and Founder, Affinity Capital Management.



## Class act

Six senior students and a teacher from Minnetonka High School volunteered to plant flowers at Opportunity Partners' Koch Campus. The efforts were part of the high school's graduation process – to give back to the community that had supported them throughout school. Thank you to Minnetonka High School for helping Opportunity Partners.



## Entrepreneurial spirit

Opportunity Partners President and CEO George Klauser was among three finalists for the 2011 Entrepreneur of the Year award from the TwinWest Chamber of Commerce. George was nominated for Opportunity Partners' ongoing training efforts with Dunwoody College of Technology. The program, which was the vision of former President and CEO Jon Thompson, has involved 25 students in Professional Cleaning training and will soon branch into Retail training in collaboration with Arc Greater Twin Cities and Arc's Value Village stores.

*Congratulations, George!*



# Capital Campaign successful finish



Above, Ryan Mendoza enjoys the celebration. Left, the Cieminski family – Don, Denise, Pat and Dar – at the Capital Campaign dinner.

A successful conclusion to Opportunity Partners’ \$4.5 million Capital Campaign was celebrated at a dinner May 12 at Opportunity Partners’ Koch Campus. The dinner drew 200 staff, program participants, donors and volunteers together to acknowledge the success of the building portion of the campaign.

“The completion of the capital building campaign enabled us to expand our goals around employment to more people with disabilities,” said President and CEO George Klauser. “We are proud of the Koch Campus and the opportunity for us to build on the vision of David and Babs Koch, as well as many others.”



President and CEO George Klauser and Volunteer Director Brigid McSherry-Scherer congratulate Char Tripet on her Legacy Award.

## Lasting legacy

Long-time volunteer and donor **Charlotte “Char” Tripet** was honored with Opportunity Partners’ Legacy Award at the 19th annual Legacy Club Celebration June 24 at the Minikahda Club in Minneapolis. Char, a parent of an adult son served by Opportunity Partners, was recognized for her steadfast support of the mission through contributions over many years as a volunteer and donor. Congratulations, Char!

## Family Focus



The Dosch family (from left), Meaghan, Katie, Hannah, Madalyn, and parents Michelle and Andy

## Andover family appreciates opportunities, support

For the Dosch family of Andover, finding a program that was just right for Meaghan, now 23, was essential. They eventually chose Opportunity Partners’ Anoka County program, located in Coon Rapids.

“We liked the smaller size,” said Michelle Dosch, Meaghan’s mom. Meaghan receives both vocational and residential support through Opportunity Partners. Michelle says the programs have expanded Meaghan’s employment options, broadened her social connections, and provided stability and routine. “I really don’t know what we would do without this in her day,” Michelle added.

A key element for Meaghan has been the chance to work. “She understands that

when she works, she gets paid, and she likes that paycheck so she can buy things she wants,” Michelle said, adding that Meaghan is working at a variety of jobs.

Opportunity Partners has also helped Meaghan expand her social circle, and she attends group activities regularly. A gifted singer, Meaghan has been invited to demonstrate her musical abilities by performing at Opportunity Partners’ fundraising gala and annual talent show.

“She really thrives when she’s given those opportunities to show off her talents,” Michelle said. “We all love to see her perform – it does something for all of us.”

# DONOR FOCUS

## Avenues for women in training

Women with disabilities can earn scholarships for customized training at Opportunity Partners, thanks to a \$12,000 grant from the WCA Foundation. Founded in 1866, WCA Foundation is the oldest benevolent nonprofit organization in Minnesota. Over its history, it has evolved into a private foundation which makes grants to a variety of nonprofit human service programs.

The grant could provide up to four women with disabilities the chance to participate in Opportunity Partners’ Certified Learning Platform in professional cleaning offered in collaboration with Dunwoody College of Technology. “We are very grateful to the WCA Foundation for their support of these exciting training opportunities,” said Mary Jo Nohava, who oversees the program for Opportunity Partners. “This will result in new learning pathways and career growth for women with disabilities.”



## It takes a village to build a garden

A horticulture class from Opportunity Partners learns new skills and supports wellness through gardening. The raised garden was designed and built by staff. Class participants planted corn, tomatoes, peppers, radishes, green beans, onions and squash. Jeannie Larson from the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum helped guide the project. At left, Isac shows off a freshly picked radish.



# SUCCESS INSPIRED, FUN REQUIRED

Opportunity Partners' annual Success Celebration on June 18 featured a carnival theme, awards, games, snacks and plenty of fun for everyone.

Twelve awards were given to program participants for achievements in independence, employment, community involvement, and other accomplishments.

WCCO 4's weekend anchor Liz Collin served as emcee. Special guests included the University of Minnesota's Goldy Gopher, the Minnesota Vikings cheerleaders and Vikings mascot Viktor. Thanks to everyone who made the day a hit by attending, volunteering or participating.



Doug Vevea reacts with pride and happiness upon receiving his award. He is shown here with Liz Collin of WCCO 4, Carol Glazer and George Klauser.

## Upcoming events

- **Made in the Shade Walk** – Saturday, September 24, Lake Calhoun
- **Edina Lions' Waffle Breakfast** – Sunday, October 2, Southview Middle School, Edina
- **Breakfast with Opportunity Partners** – Tuesday, October 4, Metropolitan Ballroom
- **Opportunity Partners' Major Fundraising Event** – Friday, April 27, 2012, Sofitel Minneapolis.



To learn about Opportunity Partners' events, join our online community by going to the Facebook icon at [www.OpportunityPartners.org](http://www.OpportunityPartners.org)

## Join us at Summit Brewery



Summit Brewery and Opportunity Partners have teamed up to host a charity happy hour event on Thursday, August 11 from 5-7:30 p.m. Bring some friends, and relax after work with refreshments and prizes at the Summit Brewing Company in St. Paul. Tickets are \$15 (must be 21 with valid ID). Contact Annie Heggernes at 952-238-4835 or [events@opportunities.org](mailto:events@opportunities.org)

# SAVE THE DATE 11.1.11

## JOIN OPPORTUNITY PARTNERS FOR CELEBRATE OPPORTUNITY AN EXECUTIVE NETWORKING AND BUSINESS RECOGNITION LUNCHEON

Co-hosted by



**Tuesday, November 1, 2011**

10:30 am – 1 pm  
Doubletree Park Place, Minneapolis

Purchase tickets at:  
<http://celebrateopportunity.eventbrite.com/>



**KEYNOTE SPEAKER:**  
Randy Lewis,  
Walgreens  
Senior VP  
Supply Chain  
Management



**EMCEE:**  
Frank Vascellaro,  
WCCO 4 News  
anchor



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