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## Sponsor the 2022 OP Gala! Saturday, May 14

**Presented by:**

# UNITEDHEALTH GROUP®

**Thank you to our sponsors!**



“Our firm has enthusiastically supported Opportunity Partners for more than 40 years. I am proud of the tremendous effort made by OP’s leadership and staff to improve the lives of the people they serve, and as a family member, I feel gratitude and appreciation for their commitment.”



- Joseph Kukla, Partner, Thiel, Anderson, Kukla & Gunderson, PLLP and Opportunity Partners Board member

**To learn about sponsorship opportunities visit [opportunities.org/gala](http://opportunities.org/gala), contact us at [events@opportunities.org](mailto:events@opportunities.org) or call us at 952-912-7442.**

## Gaining independence, reaching new goals

Sierra Jones-Iverson has been an important part of her FedEx team for four years, growing in her responsibilities as well as increasing the number of hours she works. Her duties have included unloading packages from trucks and relabeling boxes to prepare for shipment.

Sierra didn't let knee surgery slow her down, even when she had to wear a brace and undergo physical rehabilitation. "Everybody was amazed I was still working with my brace," she said, adding that she especially enjoys working with so many nice people.

***With Opportunity Partners' support, Sierra has gained confidence on the job.***

OP Employment Specialist Ashton Horsley provides regular check-ins and job coaching as needed. "If I have any problems at work, I talk to Ashton," Sierra said. "She gives me good advice."

In Sierra's quest to gain greater independence in her life, she has picked up additional shifts, nearly doubling her hours from 16 to 30 per week during busy periods. Ashton said Sierra is making great strides. "She is now working enough hours at times that she can support herself financially instead of relying on Social Security," Ashton noted.

Sierra looks forward to inviting Ashton back to FedEx to demonstrate her additional responsibilities when some of the COVID-19 restrictions have lifted. "Everything is a lot different at work, and I want to show her what I can do," she said.

Sierra, 30, is proud of all she has achieved, largely on her own. Her mom passed away in 2018, which was a very difficult time for her. "I think about all that I learned from my mom," Sierra said, adding that her mom taught her important lessons like working hard and paying her bills. Sierra has had a variety of jobs since she was 16 years old.

She is working toward advancing her career at FedEx, hoping to become a manager or trainer someday.



*Sierra shows off her "FedEx strong" t-shirt while relaxing at home. She recently began working more hours and is looking forward to moving to a new apartment.*

She enjoys earning her own money and making her own decisions. She is especially excited about her move in February to a new apartment with her orange tabby cats, Tigger, 15, and Charlie, 2. She also enjoys movies and hanging out with friends.

Ashton continues to be impressed with how Sierra seems to have her life figured out. "Sierra has accomplished a lot in the last year," Ashton said. "She's been paying her bills online and handling her money very responsibly. She's doing very well."

***OP is currently providing support to nearly 300 people working independently and on teams at community businesses.***

# A Message from the CEO

## Bill Schultz



My annual cookie delivery to the OP residences was again a bright spot for me this holiday season. I chuckled when Brian greeted me with his funny impersonations of politicians and actors, and when I arrived at one house in Minneapolis, Dar called out, "We have been waiting for you!" Cookies are a great connector.

It was comforting to see folks preparing for the holidays with their favorite traditions like any year – putting out holiday décor, making plans with family and friends, or settling in for cozy days at home. At a time when so little has felt "normal," the holiday traditions help us feel more content; more hopeful.

I'm hopeful about happenings here at OP, too:

- As we've shared, we're preparing to relocate our OP-Karlins Center from a leased space in Plymouth to a newly purchased building nearby. We've chosen a construction firm for the build-out, and we'll be optimizing the larger, brighter space for the people we serve and staff.
- The staffing shortage is impacting us in many ways, especially by limiting how many people we can bring back into services. We're focusing on new efforts to recruit and retain OP staff and working with our trade associations and legislators to keep this issue at the forefront. The future of disability services depends on it! Watch for ways you can help.
- 14c employment continues to be discussed at a federal and state level. While we believe 14c employment is an important choice for some individuals, we also support efforts to develop sustainable solutions for the future. We're fortunate to be at the right tables in these conversations, bringing our decades of experience helping people succeed in employment. More to come!

# OP welcomes new Board members!

OP welcomes the following community leaders to our Board of Directors.



## MILTON DODD – SALO

Milton currently serves as Sales Director with the talent and consulting firm Salo. Milton's career includes leadership roles with Trust Edge Leadership Institute, Genesys Works, and Lifetouch National Schools Studios. Milton holds an MBA in Data Analytics from Saint Mary's University of Minnesota and has served as a dedicated board member of several nonprofit organizations.



## JULIE SJORDAL – ST. DAVID'S CENTER

Julie is Chief Executive Officer of St. David's Center, a nonprofit providing autism treatment, pediatric therapies, mental health services, early childhood education and home support services. She has served as a teacher, social service provider and leader in the field. She has been inspired by her sister Angie, who has Down syndrome and who lives a full and happy life in the community with the support of organizations like OP.



## BRETT WHITE – GENERAL MILLS

Brett is Vice President of Finance for General Mills' North America Retail segment. In this role, he is responsible for all financial operations of General Mills' largest operating segment. Before joining General Mills in 2005, he held positions with Kraft Foods, Pillsbury, and Maple Leaf Foods in both Canada and the United Kingdom.

*Thank you to these departing Board members for their years of dedication to the mission of OP.*

**Greg Keane** – 13 years  
**Cyndi Leshner** – 12 years  
**Al Mize** – 8 years

# Volunteer program relaunch!

Opportunity Partners has relaunched our volunteer program and we are currently looking for new volunteers and supporters to get involved!

There are a range of fun and engaging opportunities for groups or individuals to plug in to in order to make a difference and support those we serve. Email us at [volunteers@opportunities.org](mailto:volunteers@opportunities.org) or visit [opportunities.org/volunteer](http://opportunities.org/volunteer) for more information!



*Employees of UnitedHealth Group volunteered by cleaning up yards at OP group homes.*

# Life-saving actions – Staff training pays off

Our hard working direct care professionals are all superstars, but one team member is truly a hero after saving a person we serve from choking.

Donna Freeman has been a Direct Support Professional with OP for four years. She got her start as a van driver before transferring into the Community Living program in Anoka County. She has built many great relationships along the way.

“My favorite thing is the people,” Donna said. “I’ve never had a bad day working with the people we serve. They make me feel good, they make me feel wanted, and they make me feel needed.”

On Dec. 17, Donna went to lunch with Shannon. They were enjoying their food at TGI Friday’s and discussing what was coming up the next week. Shannon was eating a steak.

“We were in conversation,” Donna said, “and then Shannon stopped talking. Her face started getting red and her eyes were watering. I could only hear little gasps of air, so I asked if she was OK, and she couldn’t respond.”



*Big smiles after Donna saved Shannon from choking.*

## *“That’s when I knew I had to do something.”*

Donna quickly pulled Shannon out from behind the u-shaped booth and performed abdominal thrusts, just like she had been trained in First Aid/CPR classes at OP. She successfully dislodged the food, and Shannon could breathe again.

“I’d never done it before, but I performed it perfectly, I think,” Donna said. “People around us started clapping.”

After ensuring she was OK, Donna drove Shannon to her mom’s house to share what had happened. “Her mom was so grateful,” Donna said. “And Shannon was so happy – she called me her hero! She said I saved her life.”

Congratulations and thank you, Donna! Your quick actions in a crisis inspire all of us at OP.

## Gearing up for Minnesota’s legislative session

Through our membership organizations ARRM, MOHR, and the Best Life Alliance, OP actively participates in advocacy initiatives during the legislative session. This year, the legislative session runs Jan. 31 through May 23. During that time, OP and our advocacy partners aim to increase awareness about the significant challenges the entire disability services community faces amid the pandemic, including severe staffing challenges that limit our ability to bring more people back to our services.

Here are three simple ways you can become involved in OP’s advocacy initiatives:

- Sign up for our **monthly e-newsletter** to receive updates on how to participate in advocacy action alerts during the legislative session. Sign up at [opportunities.org](https://opportunities.org).
- Save the date for **Disability Services Day at the Capitol** on **Tuesday, March 8**. The event will be hosted virtually by our advocacy partners, ARRM, MOHR, and the Best Life Alliance. Learn more about the event here: [arm.org/armevents/day-at-capitol](https://arm.org/armevents/day-at-capitol)
- Join our **Committee On Advocacy and Leadership (COAL)**. COAL is for persons served who want to learn more about self-advocacy and become involved in OP’s advocacy activities throughout the year. To join COAL, email [info@opportunities.org](mailto:info@opportunities.org).

**For more information visit:** [opportunities.org/get-involved/advocate](https://opportunities.org/get-involved/advocate)

