

## Founding family remembers OP

*Jim Zemlin thrived as a valued member of community*

In the 1950s, there were few choices for people with disabilities to live or work in the community and being institutionalized was commonplace. Fortunately, a group of revolutionary parents recognized the potential in all people, launching Opportunity Workshop in 1953.

Later called Opportunity Partners, it was Minnesota's first organization where adults with disabilities could work, earn their own money, and feel the pride and connections that come with having a job.

One founding family recently gave a generous donation to OP in memory of **James "Jim" Zemlin**, one of the organization's first persons served, who died in January at the age of 84. **Jim's mother Laura Zemlin** was the first Executive Director of Opportunity Workshop, and Jim was served by the organization for many years.

***"This donation represents Jim's life savings, money that he earned because of the existence of Opportunity Partners,"***

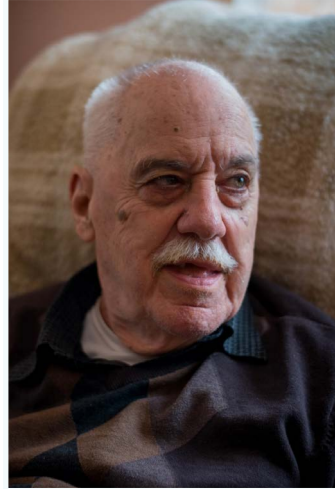
*- Laura's grandson Tom Zemlin*

"I hope you understand the deep importance and my family's desire that Jim's money went here, the place that started his working life," Tom said.

In addition to co-founding Opportunity Workshop, Laura went on to help found four similar workshops around the United States and Canada. Laura died in 1997 at the age of 84.

Jim struggled early in life because attitudes about people with disabilities were different, his family said. But he found success with the support of OP. "Jim thrived as a valuable and meaningful addition to his community," Tom said. "He inspired my grandmother Laura and many others to change our attitudes, and see people with disabilities as valued parts of our community."

Sue Zemlin, Jim's niece, said her grandmother gambled everything out of love for Jim. "Grandma was fierce," she said. "She would not accept anyone viewing Jim as anything but



*(Left) Jim Zemlin, one of the first people served by OP. (Top) Jim and his mother, Laura Zemlin, who helped found Opportunity Workshop. (Bottom) Jim and his brother Bruce as children.*

capable. At the time, the system was not set up to celebrate capabilities, but she fought and sacrificed in order to change that."

Sue added that the lessons of inclusion and acceptance pioneered by her grandma inspired many. "We saw those examples our whole life," she said.

Over the years, Jim took pride in working many jobs including packing Christmas ornaments and doing janitorial work. He also loved sports, especially sharing his love of baseball with his mother. Some of his favorite outings were to a St. Paul Saints Game or McDonald's for a cheeseburger and Coke.

When Jim died, the family asked that memorials be given to OP in remembrance of Jim and his story of inspiration. We sincerely thank the Zemlin family for their generosity and their legacy in creating new opportunities for people to thrive and live their best lives!

Memorial and estate gifts like the Zemlin's have made a significant impact on OP's mission for nearly 70 years.

**If you would like to learn more, please contact:**

***Kate Wilinski, VP of Advancement***

*kwilinski@opportunities.org or 952-930-4253*

# A Message from the CEO

When COVID-19 hit in 2020 and disability day services in Minnesota temporarily closed, OP quickly pivoted to virtual services for individuals to stay connected.

The option has proved popular, and we've continued our virtual programming even as we've reopened.

But being virtual is not quite the same as in person, so our creative staff have found a way to get folks back together. Twice each month at our Koch Campus in Minnetonka, our virtual participants have gathered for a variety of parties and activities. It has been great to be with friends again, and we're thankful for the families, staff and volunteers who are helping make this happen.

More news from around OP involves employment, staffing and our newest group home.

- 14c employment continues to be a major topic at the federal and state level, and OP is heavily involved in these conversations. Lori Schluttenhofer, OP's Vice President, Day & Employment Services, was named to the state Task Force on Eliminating Subminimum Wages. The task force will develop a plan to phase out subminimum wages by Aug. 1, 2025. We believe 14c employment is an important option, and we support efforts to develop sustainable alternatives. More to come on this important matter.
- The staffing shortage continues to disrupt our ability to bring more people back to services, resulting in a large waiting list for day services at OP. We've been active in advocacy efforts, rallying for our legislators to support solutions to the workforce crisis. We hope to see some movement soon.
- We purchased a new group home on Chicago Avenue in Bloomington last summer and are currently renovating the home. Creating greater accessibility in our 20 residences will continue to be a focus in the coming years so the people we serve can age in place comfortably.



Bill Schultz

# OP welcomes new Board member!

*OP welcomes a community leader to our Board of Directors*



## KATIE MATTIS SARVER – BELL BANK

Currently serving as Bell Bank's first Community Development Officer, Katie focuses on building and growing the bank's relationships with community, business and nonprofit leaders. Prior to joining Bell Bank, Katie served organizations and clients primarily in sports and entertainment for nearly 25 years. She is

the only person to be named Major League Soccer Corporate Partnerships Executive of the Year twice. Welcome, Katie!

## Manufacturer creates community employment

Community employment empowers people served by Opportunity Partners and leads to fulfilling careers. One company that has been a star employer is Anoka-based high-pressure pump manufacturer, Pumptec.

Pumptec's General Manager, Alan Staples, recalls first learning about OP at a manufacturing council meeting in 2019. Looking for ways to better serve his community, he's been coordinating community-based jobs with OP ever since!

Stanley works independently at Pumptec, with OP providing job coaching and other support as needed. Originally placed by OP Job Development Specialist Kathy McCauley, he has now been at Pumptec for over two years.

Stanley walks from his home to Pumptec, which is just one mile away. Four days a week, he tackles various assembly projects and builds spare parts kits. Cutting hoses, attaching fittings and pressing bearings fill his work day.

Stanley is so grateful to work at Pumptec. He recently increased his hours and has felt welcomed and included ever since he joined their workforce. **"I love my job and the people here," he said. "They treat me amazing."**

"Stanley has grown personally and professionally while being at Pumptec," said his OP Employment Specialist Maria Kern. "Co-workers and management support Stanley – even picking him up to make sure he is included in get-togethers with other employees, dropping off his phone at home when he forgot it on a Friday, and increasing his hours to have some extra income, which Stanley says has helped greatly with his self-esteem and mental health."

Alan of Pumptec appreciates the services OP provides and notes that they've made employing people an easy process. He continues to support his community by working with OP and would encourage other businesses to do the same.

**To hire workers through Opportunity Partners, learn more at [opportunities.org/businesses/hire-us/](https://opportunities.org/businesses/hire-us/)**



*Stanley pressing cams and bearings during a day at work at Pumptec.*

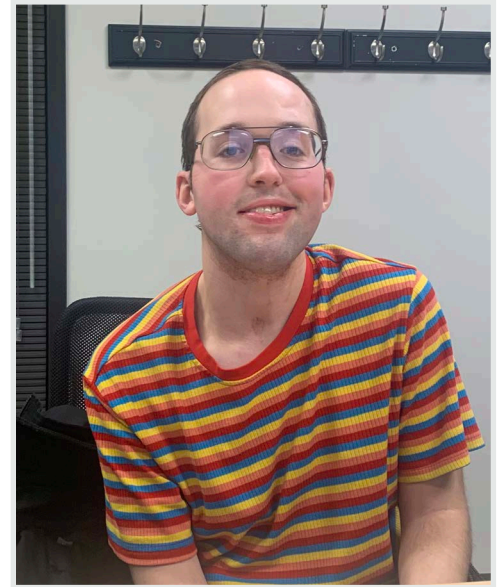
# Work success after brain injury

*With your support, Matthew is thriving at OP*

Matthew, who works at our Bren Road Service Center, has been served by Opportunity Partners since November 2019. Since COVID-19 he has increased his schedule to working five days a week! He spends most of his day working at our blister pack machines packaging small items. Prior to the pandemic, he attended classes at OP where he would grab a bite to eat, go bowling, exercise or visit the library.

Matthew sustained his brain injury while riding his bike near his St. Louis Park home in November 2018. It resulted in the loss of use of his right hand, which was difficult for him as he was originally right handed. He also lost feeling in his right foot, and became blind in his left eye.

Before his injury, Matthew enjoyed playing basketball, tennis and riding his bike. His disability makes those activities more difficult, but has found a fun summer bike riding group through Courage Kenny and a great work community at OP. Matthew is a star worker and won employee of the Month in August 2021!



*Matthew enjoys working at OP five days a week.*

***"OP is so supportive and I make friends here more easily than at the other jobs." - Matthew***

"I really look forward to work at OP," Matthew said. "In my previous jobs, I very rarely looked forward to it . . . I get to talk to the staff about movies and TV shorts, music and sometimes sports."

In his free time, Matthew enjoys going for walks and listening to podcasts. His favorite artist is Drake, he's currently watching "Inventing Anna" on Netflix and will be watching the third season of "Atlanta" soon.

## Thank you to our 2022 Gala sponsors!

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# *There's still time to join us virtually!*

## 2022 OP Gala – Saturday, May 14

We look forward to welcoming guests to our first in-person Gala in three years! There's still time to join us virtually. Signing up gives you advance access to our silent auction with more than 100 items ranging from Minnesota professional sports gear to local business packages for a night-on-the-town! You'll also receive a link to watch a livestream of the program taking place at OP-Koch Campus!

**Presented by:**

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**Register today!**

*Scan the QR code to register for free or visit [opportunities.org/gala](https://opportunities.org/gala)*

We are excited to welcome Ian Leonard as our emcee for the 2022 Gala! Ian is Chief Meteorologist at FOX 9 in the Twin Cities.

