

the BEACON

Fall 2014



"A new beginning"

Anniversaries

in October, November, December

Michelle Bocke	5	Paula Mickelson	10
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Congratulations
to all of you who
have been here for
5 years or more!

Aurora
community services

CEO Corner

by Dave Barnard

Every once in a while over the years that I have been writing the CEO Corner for the Beacon, I have based my column on a question brought forward by one of our staff. Usually it is a question that I think others may be asking themselves but just haven't presented it to anyone else. I always appreciate questions from our staff. First and foremost because if you are wondering about something, the very best thing you can do is ask the question to end the wondering. The second reason questions are always welcomed, is because through the ESOP (Employee Stock Ownership Program) Aurora is your company and you have every right to know what is going on. So thank you to the staff who asked this question and I encourage anyone else to please ask a question if there is something you are wondering about.

The question that was presented to one of our administrative staff was, "Why isn't Aurora finding enough staff to work?" That is the million dollar question for literally every employer across this country today. If you haven't noticed, take a look the next time you are driving around. Billboards, sandwich boards, posters (in aisles, on cooler doors, in bathroom stalls), signage on front doors, even notes on your receipts all saying "Now Hiring" or "Immediate Interviews." I can honestly say that in my 40 years of being in this field, I have never seen the likes of this current employment market. The craziness comes when you continually hear (especially in this political season) how unemployment is up, people are desperately seeking work, people can't find jobs, there aren't enough jobs to go around, etc. The reality is there are lots of jobs available; the problem is that many of them, like Aurora's staffing needs, are entry level positions. Rather than being seen as an opportunity to enter a company and start a career, they are simply disregarded.

Being short staffed is a very frustrating, highly emotional situation. As employees working overtime to help cover the shifts, you no doubt recognize this. The best antidote for emotions is data. Marni Waznik, Aurora's

Continued next page

Employee Services Director in charge of recruitment and hiring, recently shared some interesting data that I'd like to review with you.

Unemployment rates in all counties of the State of Wisconsin dropped (again) from July to August. At this time, no county that Aurora provides services in is greater than 5.7 percent (Jackson). And in total, these are the lowest rates in at least two years. This means there are simply fewer people in need of work at this time. Change from August of last year is as follows:

County	August 2013	August 2014
St. Croix	4.2%	3.6%
LaCrosse	5.3%	4.0%
Dunn	5.7%	4.6%
Eau Claire	5.6%	4.6%
Clark	6.0%	4.7%
Marathon	6.3%	4.9%
Portage	6.3%	5.2%
Jackson	6.7%	5.7%

Data from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) indicates the average entry level Personal Care Worker wage (statewide) is \$8.26/hr. This job category is #11 on the top 25 list of growing job openings. An increase of 5.99% in number of openings is noted between 2012 and 2014 with an anticipated increase in openings of 36.8% by 2020! And of all job openings listed on the Job Center website, PCWs are #3. Apparently, we are not alone in our efforts to find staff.

Ironically, considering the employment data we just reviewed that suggests there are more jobs than there are workers, the truth is that one of our greatest competitor for our entry level positions is Unemployment Compensation (UC). In the first six months of 2014, Aurora received 750 applications for work. Over half of those applicants never returned phone calls or emails regarding those applications, or failed to show up for the interview. Dozen upon dozen of those applicants were bold enough to tell us directly that they only applied for the job because they were required to in order to continue their UC benefits. Our Executive Director Holly Hakes was recently approached in public by someone she knows personally who had applied for work, advising her that she shouldn't spend any time on her application, because she wasn't really interested in the job (but she was interested in continuing her UC benefits)!

All of you are working hard to help us provide the necessary supports to our consumers, our recruitment staff are working round the clock to solicit applications and 50 percent of our "applicants" are not really interested in the job? Maddening is the word that comes to mind.

Although today's employment market is very tough we have a certain edge in the recruitment arena – YOU. Marni Waznik recently shared some other interesting data with Aurora's Senior Administrators - referral sources.

When considering all of the many, many outlets we use to market our positions, including the internet (Zip, Indeed, Simply Hired, AuroraServices.com, FaceBook, Job Center, Craigslist), colleges/universities (UW-River Falls, UW-Stout, UW-Stevens Point, UW-Eau Claire), job fairs, and newspaper/radio/television advertisements, 66% of our referrals came from YOU. Astounding is the word that comes to mind. That is amazing!

The answer to the original question to "Why isn't Aurora finding enough staff to work?" is largely unknown. We have to form some opinions based on data and even then, those opinions are simply that - opinions. We can't focus on what we don't know for sure, but we can and should focus on what we DO know. We know that YOU are doing an incredible job stepping up and helping us cover the open shifts. We also know that YOU are our most consistent and effective referral source. Focusing on these two truths, we have implemented "thank you" programs that will reward employees on a weekly basis for overtime hours worked as well as increased and expanded our finder fee programs to thank you for your referrals (see more information on next page).

Together, we have ridden out tough times in the past. We will ride this one out too. We are very grateful for all of you Aurora staff who are picking up additional hours and ensuring quality services to those we serve. We are appreciative to our management staff also covering many shifts in the home. Knowing that everyone, from direct care staff to our managers, including our Executive Director, are sacrificing time with their families and loved ones to work extra shifts, to provide care to our Aurora family is humbling.

I cannot adequately express my gratitude for what you are doing to care for our consumers. I am deeply grateful and in awe of YOU.

Thank you for everything you do,

Dave



Photo by Dave Barnard



Thank You!

Aurora truly appreciates your hard work and dedication during this difficult labor market. We want to show our appreciation to you for the extra hours you are working and for the referrals you send our way for employees!

Effective October 12, 2014 until January 17, 2015

- Our finders fee to you for referring a new hire who completes **90 days of employment will be \$150.**
- New employees will earn **\$100 after 90 days of employment** and another **\$100 after 180 days of employment!**

And to reward you for the extra hours you have been picking up, you will earn a bonus based on the overtime hours you work each week.

- 4 - 15.75 OT hours will earn \$10
- 16 - 23.75 OT hours will earn \$25
- 24 hours or more of OT will earn \$50

These bonuses will be paid bi-monthly and separate from your payroll check.

Thank you for your dedicated service to the consumers we support!



Employee of the Quarter



Kim Schmitt, Program Assistant, is the Employee of the Quarter!

According to Andrew Garr, Kim's supervisor, Kim is one of the best advocates at the Eau Claire Day Center. She is very proactive in her approach with consumers and presents them with choices rather than demands. Kim

loves her job and this is shown by the incredible work she does to ensure that our consumers, staff, and the company are presented in the best possible way.

Kim has been employed with Aurora since 2010 and began working at one of the homes in the Eau Claire area. She started at the Eau Claire Day Center approximately one year ago. Her advocacy shines when it comes to individuals with disabilities and goes above and beyond in ensuring these individuals have the accommodations they need to be successful.

When it comes to safety Kim is very active in organizing the Eau Claire Day Center to insure that consumers and staff remain safe at all times. Not only is Kim passionate about safety but very passionate in all aspects of her position with Aurora. She demonstrates follow through on not only her daily tasks, but has gone above and beyond in completing side projects as needed. If there is something that needs to be cleaned or organized Kim will volunteer for the job and always assures it is completed at a high standard.

Kim has grown in her role of Program Assistant and demonstrates good decision making daily. She ensures the consumer's safety, comfort and dignity are maintained.

Congratulations Kim on receiving the Employee of the Quarter award.

A Day In The Life

Nick Graham, Employee Development Coordinator in the La Crosse office, has worked with Aurora since 2010. Nick started his employment as a Mental Health Specialist supporting consumers with mental health issues living in the community. In January of this year, Nick accepted a transfer into his current role as Employee Development Coordinator and has fallen in love with his job! "I love meeting, hiring and training our Aurora staff," he explained. He is very passionate and excited about his opportunity to connect with Aurora employees from day one and to continue to be a resource available to support them to be their BEST throughout their entire career with Aurora. "I love this office," he said, speaking of the La Crosse employees and managers. "I try to make each day fun," he added. Nick feels the work we do at Aurora is all about relationships with consumers, employees and managers. He loves the opportunity to be a point person and a resource to everyone hoping to help enhance relationships, job satisfaction and quality of services. Nick's "love" of his work is apparent when you speak with him. His eyes twinkle with excitement for the opportunities that each day brings. Speaking of love, Nick proposed (finally!) and is engaged to be married to his true love of 9 years, Cassandra Ray, who is also employed by Aurora as a Vocational Coordinator!



Star of the Quarter



Jana Hansen, Personnel Administrator for the Call Center, is the Star of the Quarter!

One of the things that you will hear in Company Orientation with ARA is this, "you will wear many hats when you work for Aurora." Jana is a perfect example of this!

Jana began her journey with Aurora in August of 2002. She worked in the homes in the Black River Falls area and quickly became a strong advocate for the consumers that she supported. After several years of CLA work she switched her focus and moved to the Black River Falls office where she was a Scheduler and assisted the Program Director and Office Manager in any task that needed to be done.

When the Call Center opened in Eau Claire Jana threw her name in the hat and has found a home there since its inception. She has worked all shifts and is now their Personnel Administrator where once again, she is wearing many hats.

The one thing that hasn't changed for Jana is her fierce advocacy to the many staff and consumers' that she is involved with. Todd Meinburg, CCS2 and teammate of Jana's said, "Jana mentors and models safety through her leadership and by living it openly for all staff to see. Jana has shown time and again that she supports everyone being safe and points out helpful observations for safety. Jana is often the first Aurora person to respond to an employee in need in the Call Center, whether it is an injury, illness or an adverse concern causing anxiety/worry. Jana answers all concerns with true empathy. Jana always puts our consumers concerns and needs first.

Jana responds with support and physical help seeking adequate coverage for the consumers and staff. I have worked with Jana when she needed to assert our consumers needs and rights."

Todd (who nominated Jana for this award) sums it up by saying, "When we talk about doing the right thing I think of Jana. I feel blessed to know her and have learned a valuable professional lesson for myself. Jana is never invasive when asked for help or sees a situation needs intervention and the expertise of a seasoned Aurora staff. Jana will assess the issue and offer support to affect the best possible outcome for all stake holders. Jana is gentle and firm with her commitment to all. To me, Jana's foundation is her integrity. She is open, honest and trustworthy in dealing with consumers, coworkers, stakeholders, managers and the communities where we have any impact."



Jana, in the middle of the back row, and the team.



Scratch Off for Safety Winners!

Pamela Knetsch from 118 won a \$25 gift card!

Tony Kuhfal from the Wausau Center won a \$5 gift card!

Katie Skrzeczkoski from 019 won a \$5 gift card!

Congratulations, everyone!



Meet Marnie: An ambitious young woman, published author, and outspoken advocate for individuals with disabilities. It may appear, to some, that her life ended a decade ago, following a vehicle accident, leaving her with a traumatic brain injury. But

engulfed life emerged; more resilient and stronger than ever before! Marnie currently has 2 published works of her original poetry (A Midsummer's Memoir; a UW-Superior publication in collaboration with other poets).

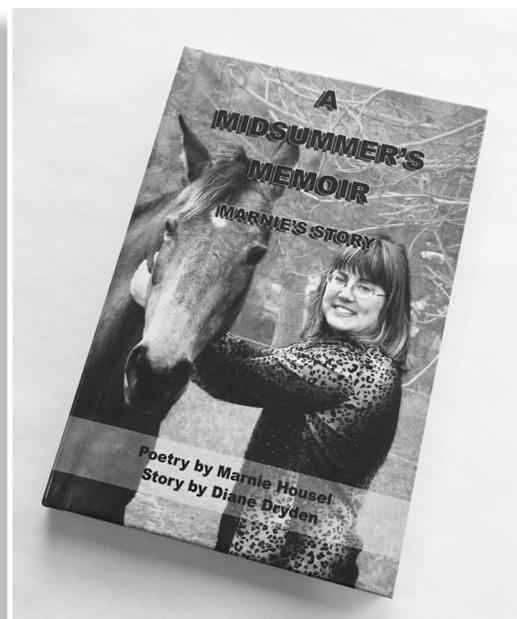
When I asked her if her poetry was free verse, she scoffed stating, "Free verse is like playing a game without rules. I'm okay with free verse, however much

prefer poetry with structure." She describes her work as transcendental classic American verse; reminiscent of Walt Whitman. Stating her favorite work of his as, "Leaves of Grass." She attributes her success and continued strength to those around her. Her mother (having overcome a disability herself), her father (a hard worker who taught her the ways of the cowboy), and her numerous staff who have been a direct influence on her development.

In addition to poetry, Marnie enjoys reading, horseback riding, painting, and philosophical debates. Her biggest suggestion to the world around her, "READ! Read anything! Magazines, books, poetry, brochures, anything that will engage your mind and keep you moving forward thinking." Her tenacity is truly admirable. Thank you Marnie for your strength and courage to "get back up on that horse."

In true Marnie fashion (always loving the last word), she requested I end this piece with these words of wisdom (though, albeit, hard learned), "We need to learn to 'let go' in order to run again and feel the wind on our face. Have faith in what you are doing and go for it!"

Life Photo of the Month



Marnie's book, "A Midsummer's Memoir."

If you have any questions or comments about the Beacon, please send them to: Beacon@AuroraServices.com or mail to: Stavroula at Aurora Community Services P.O. Box 68, Menomonie, WI 54751.