

# Did You Know?

## MSS VOLUNTEERS PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE



At MSS we're able to provide programs and services to the people we serve to support them live the lives they choose and help them achieve their personal goals. This may include teaching computer skills, ceramics and pottery making, or simply taking a trip into the community.

None of this would be possible if not for the incredible volunteers we're able to work with. "Our volunteers play such an important part in the day-to-day services provided to the people we support," says MSS Development

Associate, Jodi Meerovich.

Even more encouraging than the work our volunteers are doing, is the fact that volunteerism at MSS is on a sharp increase. During the 2017 calendar year, volunteer hours increased 67 percent from the year before. "By choosing to spend their time with us, they elevate our programming to a new level, and we are so appreciative of the skills and fun they bring to the people in our programs," Meerovich added. Additionally, volunteers make important personal connections with MSS participants.

The numbers echo how important volunteers are to MSS. The 1,623 volunteer hours logged in 2017 accounted for more than six hours every day the agency was open, and five of our six centers saw an increase in volunteer hours from 2016 to 2017.

If you have an interest in being an MSS volunteer, or learning more about how you can help, please contact Jodi Meerovich at 651-793-4199 or send an email to [jmeerovich@mwsservices.org](mailto:jmeerovich@mwsservices.org).



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## Creating tiles for the CAFAC "Hot House"

MSS participants from St. Paul had the unique opportunity to participate at the Chicago Avenue Fire Arts Center (CAFAC). They added porcelain enameling to steel panels during the 8-week program. These weather-resistant panels were on display at CAFAC's Open "Hot" House last month and will be featured in the sculpture garden at our MSS St. Paul Center this summer. The sculpture garden was made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.

CAFAC is a non-profit arts organization that focuses on fine and industrial art forms that are produced using heat, spark or flame. The 8-week program for MSS was made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.



## SAVE the DATE for Celebrate! 2018

Our 4th Annual Celebrate! event has been set for Saturday, September 29 from 5-9 p.m.. It will once again be at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul and be a night filled with great possibilities.

We will be removing the words "Midwest Special Services, Inc." from our public-facing materials. Officially, our name will not change as we will be retaining the words in our legal documents and filings, but going forward we will be doing business as MSS. In 1983 we changed our agency name from United Cerebral Palsy of Greater St. Paul, Inc. to Midwest Special Services, Inc. which was chosen by the people we supported at that time. We want to hold on to that bit of our history. However, in our field sometimes perfectly good words evolve into a meaning that is less desirable and that is what has happened to the word "Special". A recommendation to make this change was made to the MSS Board of Directors and they unanimously approved making the change. Our legal requirements have already been satisfied for the change. The transition will be gradual and will include everything from our website to the vehicles we own and operate. We are excited for this change as MSS continues to evolve.



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**From Our President**

I have announced to the MSS Board of Directors that I plan on retiring in October. Working at MSS for the last 38, and soon to



be 39, years has been a fabulous opportunity for me and my family and I did not make this decision lightly, because I have loved this job and this agency for my entire time here.

The people we support, and their families, are some of the best people in the world and they are supported every day by a staff of people who are wonderful and truly committed to what they do.

Our Board of Directors is a tremendous asset to our agency and I have been proud to work with them for so many years.

But, it is time for me to turn over the reins and spend more time with my wife, Mary, our son Eric and his family, and to do some more traveling, fishing and quite possibly volunteering.

While I will not be actively involved with MSS, I will continue be a supporter of MSS.

The Board of Directors has begun their search process for the new President and they will do a terrific job of finding the next person to lead MSS.

They plan to have someone in place by September, which will allow me to work with that individual for a few weeks before I leave to help make the transition as smooth as possible.

There will be a retirement event planned so please stay tuned for more information about that as the time draws nearer.

**RETIREMENT to next**

## New employment services expected

We are anticipating the rollout of new employment services by the Minnesota Department of Human Services later this year. The new services are employment exploration, employment development and employment support.

These will be good opportunities for the people we support who are interested in work, but each will require a different planning process because they will be authorized in 15-minute units instead of full or partial days. When these services are authorized and provided in the future, DT&H services may also be authorized on the same day but must be tracked and billed as 15-minute unit rates.

The scheduled implementation date for the new services is July 1, 2018 and they will be transitioned on a rolling implementation basis, meaning someone attending MSS and receiving DT&H or SES services, will determine at their annual meeting the types of employment services desired and the number of units they will need for each service.

We anticipate the implementation date of July 1 will be delayed, but we are working diligently to be prepared when the new services are rolled out. We will continue to provide communication as this process unfolds.

If you have any questions or concerns about these changes, please contact MSS' Director of Quality Assurance, Chris Salter, at 651-793-4116 or send an email to [csalter@mwsservices.org](mailto:csalter@mwsservices.org).



## Letting our voices be heard

MSS took part in the Best Life Alliance Day at the Capitol in St. Paul on March 13. We were able to join thousands of like-minded people who were in attendance to rally in support of people with disabilities. After the rally, participants had the opportunity to meet with individual legislators and have discussions about the issues facing our industry.





Since the fall of 2015, MSS has provided supervised work crews through an ongoing partnership with the University of St. Thomas, Dining Services operations. Over 80 MSS participants have earned real wages and gained valuable work experience through this partnership. This has helped them reach individual goals of earning competitive employment. Our partnership with the University of St. Thomas has resulted in more than 10,000 hours of paid work for MSS participants in 2017. We anticipate a significant increase in the number of paid positions and work hours in 2018.



**P**roviding work opportunities for the people we serve is vitally important.

During the past three years, MSS participants have embraced that opportunity and created a highly successful enterprise at the University of St. Thomas. "Work crew team members and MSS job coaches have done an outstanding job," says MSS Business Development and Community Representative Randy Bloom. "Our work crews are viewed as a critical component by University of St. Thomas dining services, which has allowed for a significant expansion of work positions for MSS at the beginning of 2018."

MSS currently staffs 20 positions at six campus dining locations during the

school year, working five days a week on utility, dish room operations and other service related tasks. Each crew is led by an MSS Job Coach, with responsibility for worker training, oversight of quality assurance and to provide a key, on-site liaison with UST management staff. "Things have been going really well," said Don Bergdahl, Assistant Director of Retail Operations for the University of St. Thomas. "It's nice to have the consistency in the workers from MSS."

Bloom says, with the school year ending soon, he is focused on securing summer seasonal work partnerships for MSS participants during The University of St. Thomas summer break. If you are interested in learning more about MSS work opportunities, please contact Randy at 612-581-5570.

## Retirement...continued from front

MSS is an agency that is well positioned for great success into the future. The energy and enthusiasm for our mission from our staff and the Board of Directors is evident.

While there are changes coming to our services, we will work with you, like we always have, to make sure these changes positively impact the people we serve.

Your support remains a vital component to our success, as resources

are sometimes difficult to garner.

I cannot thank you enough for the support you continue to provide which allows us to offer our programs and services and make a difference in the lives of so many people.

Lyth J. Hartz, President



## Spring Art Crawl

The Spring Saint Paul Art Crawl is set for April 27-29. We will be hosting 12 local artists, including some MSS artists, at The Show Gallery Lowertown, which will include paintings, pottery, photography, jewelry and fashion.

There will be live music, art demos, Tarot Card reading and spoken word events.

The Show Gallery Lowertown will be open during the Art Crawl from 6-10 pm on Friday, 12-8 pm on Saturday and 12-5 pm on Sunday.

## CoLab 2018

The Show Gallery Lowertown will be hosting the 4th Annual CoLab exhibition in September, with an Opening Reception on Saturday, September 8 from 4-7 pm. The show is open from September 6-30.

CoLab is an inclusive exhibition showcasing collaborative artwork created by self-taught and professional artists.

Join us to talk with the artists about their work and find out who walks away with this year's *Bill Murray Choice Award*.

346 N. Sibley Street, St. Paul, MN 55101

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# MSS helped Dan Stallworth find his passion as an artist

Dan Stallworth came to MSS in February 2015. Shortly thereafter, he got involved in painting classes at his Eagan center with his then Direct Support Professional, Stephen Heebink. Dan's curiosity with painting quickly grew into a passion, and he began working with MSS Art Facilitator Lara Hanson. "God put Stephen and Lara in my life to encourage and help me paint," Dan says. "MSS is my family."

Dan's ability as a painter has grown since he began. His work has been on display at The Show Gallery Lowertown in St. Paul and he participates in MSS art workshops and Upstream Arts. "All of these things help inspire my painting," Dan says.

Recently, Dan's work was chosen as this year's winner of the Celebrate! Art Contest put on by MSS. His work will be the backdrop on the public-facing materials related to the event, which is slated for September 29.

"I was nervous about the contest and wondered if I would win," Dan says. "It was a surprise when I found out I had won. I was very happy but I did not expect it."



Dan Stallworth sits in front of his work at The Show Gallery Lowertown in St. Paul. He was part of the duo exhibition in March, *Man and Woman at (Art)Work*, along with fellow MSS artist Tiranke Sidime.

## New tax code for 2018 to have impact on giving

We are grateful for the continued generosity of our donors who help us provide programs and services and make a positive impact on the lives of so many people.

Changes to the federal tax code that were passed in December 2017, took effect on January 1, 2018

Now, Minnesota taxpayers who do not itemize deductions on their federal income tax return may subtract a portion of their charitable contributions on their state income tax return. Minnesota's charitable deduction, known as the non-itemizer charitable deduction, provides a tax deduction of 50 percent of total charitable contributions over \$500. Contributions to any 501(c)(3) organization, such as MSS, are eligible for

the deduction including all public charities and church/faith organizations.

The tax bill increased the charitable giving limits for taxpayers who itemize deductions from the former cap of 50 percent of adjusted gross income (AGI) to 60 percent of AGI. This will enable higher income taxpayers to deduct a higher percentage of their overall income for contributions to charitable nonprofits in 2018.

Minnesota legislators are working on a bill that would strengthen the state's charitable deductions for households which do not itemize their taxes.

## Minnesota Legislators visit MSS

The 2018 Minnesota legislative session started February 18, but prior to that, we were fortunate to have the opportunity to connect with two of our elected leaders.



Minnesota Senator Greg Clausen (D-56) greeted Jessica during a tour of our Apple Valley center.

In the weeks prior to the start of the legislative session, we met with Minnesota Senators Greg Clausen and Jim Carlson at our Apple Valley and Eagan centers.

We gave each of them a closer look at the programs and services we provide as well as spend time discussing business-critical issues such as the staffing shortage our industry currently faces.

In addition to statewide staffing shortage, we discussed the changes in employment services coming later this year from the Minnesota Department of Human Services and how an increase in the City of St. Paul's minimum wage will impact how we provide our support.



Senator Jim Carlson, right, listened to Matt, left, and Eagan Center Director Jenna Childs, during a tour this winter. Carlson is the State Senator for District 51, serving the communities of Eagan and Burnsville.