A couple of years ago, Zach M. was a student in his last year of school who participated in Kaposia’s competitive employment grant through the Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities. The grant allows Kaposia to begin working with students before they leave school so that they have a job (and a seamless transition) before completing their public school education. Zach is one of many examples of how a great job match is a “win-win” for the employer and the employee. Zach has been working at Home Depot for nearly two years. Zach has achieved his own high level of success on the job at Home Depot. During that time, he has received 10 (!) badges for outstanding service. Home Depot awards badges to employees who have high standards in customer service and commitment to the company. Zach has earned his badges by helping customers, coming in for extra shifts and coming in to help with “emergencies” like snow shoveling when needed.

Home Depot can count on Zach. His supervisor says he is a great worker and is always looking for ways to help out. His co-workers echo those praises and see Zach as a great part of the team. Zach is so eager to work that he often arrives an hour early for his shift.

This job is a great match for Zach. He likes interacting with others, takes pride in his work and is always striving to do an even better job. Zach appreciates his badges as a tangible reward for doing a good job (along with the cash bonuses that come with them), but for Zach, he’s just doing his job.

by Beth Medina and Carol Rydell
You’re Hired!

When Helen began her job at Dependable Home Health, she was just looking for a handful of hours. Her employer, who also happens to be her residential care provider, found a few tasks around the office that Helen could assist with. Helen sat at the front desk during her shifts, stamping payroll envelops and chatting with those who came in. It only took a few shifts for other employees to notice that Helen had a skill for connecting with people and she appeared to love the social interaction. During this time, her employer was busy conducting interviews for open Direct Support Professional positions when it occurred to Helen’s supervisor that Helen would be a great addition to the interview panel. Not only would she bring a needed perspective, she would essentially be hiring staff that could potentially support her down the road. “At Dependable, we have a long standing concept that we want to ensure the folks we support are as active in designing their supports as possible,” said John Rentschler, Innovative Lead and Project Manager at Dependable Home Health. “Being a long time service recipient herself, Helen has seen quite a few staff come and go over the years. We thought she’d be perfect for the role.” He presented the idea to Helen who agreed to the opportunity, but immediately felt tense over the upcoming new experience.

Over the next few weeks, Helen and her Employment Consultant spent time reading through the interview questions and discussing what each one might reveal about a candidate. Helen spent a lot of time deciding which question would be hers, because in Helen’s words, “It’s important that I figure out who is best. I need to pick someone who I would feel comfortable with.” Once she made her selection, they reworded the question so that it came from Helen’s heart and then she practiced reading the question aloud.

At this time, Helen has been a part of several interviews, has hired two, and admits that there were a few candidates that didn’t feel right. “Helen has a good read on if someone is being genuine or just running through the questions,” said Rentschler. “She has a great sense if they’re going to be a good match for the service.” Helen says that she plans to continue interviewing because it makes her feel happy to be hiring good people.

The Secret to Our Success

Back in the late 90s, if anyone remembers, we were in the middle of one of the most successful economic periods in history and unemployment was at around two percent. Kaposia was struggling to find quality employees. Kaposia was also working on a number of organizational changes at the time and desperately needed people.

As we worked on our recruitment process, one thing became clear. We were more interested in a candidate’s values than in their experience. One particular interview became legendary.

I was interviewing a young woman who had just moved to the Twin Cities from southern Wisconsin. As I interviewed her it became clear that she was very bright and had a heart for people.

One of the final interview questions was “Tell me about an accomplishment of which you’re really proud.” Tears welled up in her eyes as she responded, “Raising my daughter.” Mela was a single mom who was moving to the Twin Cities so her daughter could have a relationship with her father.

We hired her. And later we promoted her.

Years later it became something of an inside joke that we only hire people who cry during their interviews. Mela was part of a core group of people we hired in this time period who helped shape Kaposia into the organization it is today. We still get together on a regular basis as part of a Kaposia “Alumni” group. These employees were not only talented but committed to our mission. Though they have moved on, they are still changing the world.

One of the core values of Kaposia is that we need competent and dedicated employees to meet our mission. Our employees are what make us a successful company. Without them providing the day to day support to the people we serve, we are quite simply, not a good company. With them, we can change lives.

We are once again experiencing a workforce shortage in our industry. Kaposia is a member of the Best Life Alliance which has been advocating for a provider rate increase which will be designated for the salaries and compensation of direct service workers. We hope they will pass it. Our dedicated employees deserve it.

If you’re looking to work for a company which believes everyone deserves the opportunity to live the American Dream, visit us at www.kaposia.com/careers.

The Secret to Our Success

from the desk of the CEO

JON ALEXANDER

You’re Hired!

by Kelly Merchant
In 2014, Steven Jacobson published his first poetry book, *Spiritual Gait*. Steven has continued efforts to share his writing with others and has worked diligently in the past year to partner with local bookstores and to make his book available in e-book form for other’s viewing. In a recent interview with Steven he shared the following regarding his work and experiences.

"Following the publication of my book, I was faced with the challenge of how to get my book into the hands of others. I love writing and this is a gift; something that comes naturally to me. Promoting and marketing my book has been something I have needed to learn. I have spent a lot of time researching and contacting local book stores, as well as on-line e-book sources. It has always been my desire to share my writings with others, with the hope that others will enjoy and benefit from my work.

I currently have my book in five local bookstores and three on-line e-book sources. I recently submitted my book to Hennepin County Library (41 county libraries). Acceptance and shelving of Spiritual Gait in the library system is currently pending. I will be sharing poems at library reading sessions (see below). I’ve also spent time contacting churches and speaking with others about my book.

I have continued to write and have written over 90 new poems. I am preparing my second book, *Spiritual Realm*, which will include many of my new poems. I recently submitted new poems to Milkweed Editions to be considered for the Lindquist & Vennum Prize for Poetry. This is an annual regional prize, presented in partnership by Milkweed Editions and the Lindquist & Vennum Foundation. I have also submitted my work to Gray Wolf Press for the Emily Dickenson Book Award through the Poetry Foundation. Both poetry contests offer prizes including publication of book and a $10,000 cash prize.

I have also continued to take writing classes at the Loft and am involved in a number of on-line poetry groups. I have benefited from fellow writer’s critiques and insights. More than anything, I simply enjoy writing and putting my work into a form which others can access and enjoy. Writing has helped me maintain my mental health, as it is something I love to do and focus on. I feel better when I am engaged in it."

Steven’s work was recently published in *Access Press* and has appeared in many poetry and literary magazines. He is a featured poet in *metric conversions: poetry of our time*. An e-book of *Spiritual Gait* was published in June 2016 by Storyteller Magazine. Steven has also received positive reviews from numerous local and national reviewers. The book is a wonderful collection of eighty free verse poems about nature, children and spiritual essence. Steven’s compositions feature concepts and experiences that, while common in daily life, are extraordinary and inspirational.


Area bookstores that carry the paperback edition are:

- Magers & Quinn Bookstore–3038 Hennepin Ave S, Minneapolis
- Eat My Words–1228 2nd St. N.E., Minneapolis
- Subtext Bookstore–6th W 5th St., St. Paul
- Red Balloon–891 Grand Ave, St. Paul
- Micawber’s Books–2230 Carter Ave, St. Paul

Up-coming library readings:

- Golden Valley Library–830 Winnetka Ave N.: Wed, Mar 1, Apr 5, May 3 (6:30 – 8:00 PM)
- East Lake Library–2727 East Lake St Minneapolis: Tue, Mar 21, Apr 18, May 16 (6:30–6:00 PM)
Mission: Discovery

by Kandy Hagen and Lori Manthe

Michael Koebnick is one of those people you meet and know they are destined for great things. Michael has a quick wit, a ready smile with a bundle of talents, skills, and interests. Michael shared his interests in history, investigation, baseball, technology, space, knowledge in fonts and grammar, guitar and music. Michael’s love for family, friends and home shines through in his personality. Together through Discovering your Personal Genius™ it took us on a path to Burnet Title.

Following the initial groundwork of the Discovering Your Personal Genius™ process, areas of skills, talents, and interests were used to begin finding employment. The process is more than just looking for any job. Rather, it uses a series of informational meetings to discover how vocational skills might be used in certain jobs. The information gained from the informational meetings is used to connect with companies who need the specific skills, talents, and interests of the individual.

In Michael’s case, his attention to detail and proofreading interests, combined with the needs of Burnet Title, led to a job he truly enjoys. Michael’s job provides a sense of ownership and accomplishment. Michael is approaching the one-year anniversary of working with Burnet Title and continues to be excited and enthusiastic about his work and the employees involved in helping him feel successful.

Michael shared that he enjoys the team, the working environment, and that “Burnet Title is the right place for him”. Michael’s position at Burnet Title is Production Support which includes mailings, document imaging, creating electronic files, disclosure statements, and other miscellaneous duties.

Karen Drill at Burnet Title shared, “Michael is a ‘people person’ and a ‘team player.’ He works well with others on our production team. Michael is very detail oriented, which is so important in our business. With his responsibilities as production support, he utilizes his time wisely and prioritizes his day to be sure those daily tasks are accomplished. Michael is willing to take on new projects and continues to improve his communication skills. These assets have helped him to be successful, and we are pleased to have him on our Burnet Title team.”

Burnet Title was awarded Employer of the Year by Arc Minnesota in September 2016. On hand to celebrate this award were co-workers Karen Drill, Karen Cromer, and Ronnie Semlak, Michael and his family as well as Kandy Hagen and Lori Manthe from Kaposia. Burnet Title was recognized for creating a work environment that is diverse; that appreciates the skills, talents, and abilities of each employee; and that shows the value of each employee’s contributions and abilities by paying competitive wages. This recognition includes hiring, supporting, and valuing its employees with disabilities.

Chad and Joanie, Michael’s parents shared, “We are truly blessed to be associated and have benefited from the Kaposia organization. As parents, we were delighted to have found a service that focused on Michael’s skills, talents, and interests. Michael is confident and growing his skills and, most of all, he enjoys going to work every day. We are proud of Michael and look forward to his continued success.”
In Minnesota, 50 percent of people with intellectual disabilities and 40 percent of people with physical disabilities who are unemployed, want to work, according to recent surveys.

This year Gov. Mark Dayton has proposed new employment services to ensure more Minnesotans with disabilities can seek, retain and maintain paying jobs of their choice in the community.

Human Services Commissioner Emily Piper visited Just Paws Pet Salon in Lilydale to highlight that many Minnesotans with disabilities already are working in competitively paying jobs they have found or created. Disability employment service providers like Kaposia often play a key role in the process.

“Competitive employment is not only personally rewarding but can be a way out of poverty for people with disabilities, which is good for people and good for Minnesota,” said Piper. “Reforming employment services will mean more people with disabilities will find work in the community. Not everyone will choose to work for pay but everyone will have opportunities to explore what they would like to do.”

Jessica Knoepfler had a lifelong dream of working with dogs, but after completing grooming school, had difficulty keeping up with the pace at big-box grooming salons. Kaposia worked with Jessica, who struggles with short-term memory, to locate an employer that would accommodate her needs. When the owner decided to close the business, Knoepfler’s parents bought Just Paws, where she now has another employee and continues to receive support from her Kaposia job coach.

Little Canada-based Kaposia’s service offerings include a customized employment service to help individuals find jobs, supported employment to provide training and support once a job is found and retirement services to help older adults with disabilities remain active in their communities in their interest areas.

“Our niche is helping people find jobs that fit their skills, interests and passions, which also helps an employer to increase the value of their company,” said Jon Alexander, chief executive officer of Kaposia. “All of this is accomplished with individualized planning, discovering the right job in the community and providing the right training and support for both the person and the employer.”

Gov. Dayton’s budget calls for three new government-financed employment services to transform current employment services for people with disabilities. They are:

- Employment exploration services to introduce a person to competitive employment opportunities through individualized education, work experiences and support services. This will allow the person to make an informed decision about working in competitively paying jobs in the community.
- Employment development services, which are individualized services that will help a person to achieve paid employment in their community, including becoming self-employed or establishing a small business.
- Employment support services, which are individualized services and supports that will help people maintain paid employment in community businesses. Services will be provided in settings where a person can interact with co-workers and others without disabilities.

DHS is working with stakeholders to redefine services the state and federal government pay for to ensure that people have experiences and options to make informed choices about employment.

“Employment service providers like Kaposia are critical,” Piper said, “to moving services toward greater choice for people with disabilities and to raising expectations that working-age Minnesotans with disabilities can achieve competitive, integrated employment.”

The employment proposals for people with disabilities are part of an overall strategy proposed by Gov. Dayton to increase independent living for people with disabilities and older adults. More information about this and other budget proposals are available on the 2017 session fact sheets page on the DHS website.
Transportation remains one of the biggest barriers to employment for people with disabilities. Individuals often depend on public transportation programs to get to and from work, but buses don’t always go where people live or work and Metro Mobility struggles to keep up with demand. Each year Kaposia Transportation Services fills those gaps.

Kaposia vehicles travel over 370,000 miles a year! That many miles require a lot of ongoing maintenance, and ultimately vehicles need to be replaced. Kaposia wants to ensure our customers have the quality transportation and access to the community that they need and deserve.

To help us fill the gap between funding the actual cost of providing transportation, Kaposia will be holding its annual Walk for Wheels fundraiser on May 6th. The event will again be held at the Jaycees Shelter in Roseville’s Central Park and walking around beautiful Bennett Lake.

I’ve developed many relationships with customers over the years and when I see the struggle they have to endure for a simple ride, it puts things in perspective. That’s why I will be walking and trying to get as many other people to join me as possible!

If you are interested in sponsorship opportunities, please contact me at jreuter@kaposia.com or at 651-789-2830 for more information.

I hope to see you on May 6th!!!