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STATE SENATOR • 17TH SENATE DISTRICT

Capitol Update By Senator Howard Marklein September 30, 2016

Purposeful Passion at Work In Wisconsin

When you have passion for something, it's tough to walk away. So it is for Tom Schraeder, Executive Director of Hodan Community Services (HCS) in Mineral Point.

This week, HCS is celebrating Tom's many years of devoted leadership and service as he steps down from his role as Executive Director after 44 years. But he isn't stepping far.

Tom is officially passing the torch to Tom Schmit who has served as Deputy Director for four years, but he will continue to serve HCS as the part time Director of Development. In HCS's most recent newsletter, Tom said, "I realized that it would be very difficult for me to just stop working for Hodan Community Services all at once as it has been such an important part of my life. I also felt that I still had much to offer HCS."

The HCS community is fortunate to be the recipient of this kind of passion for the work they do! But they are not alone.

HCS is one of several organizations in Wisconsin that provide employment, education and enrichment activities for adults with disabilities. Nearly every organization of its kind is led by long-time, passionate people who care about the well-being, abilities and potential of Wisconsinites with disabilities.

In the 17th Senate District, we have HCS, Vernon Area Rehabilitation Center (VARC) in Reedsburg, Viroqua, Necedah and Richland Center; Southwest Opportunities Center (SOC), Inc. in Lancaster; and GreenCo Industries in Monroe. Each of these organizations provide workshop employment opportunities for adults with a wide array of disabilities along with enrichment activities and day programs.

The workshop employment opportunities involve providing work that is completed in a supervised and supportive environment. Clients package products, work in food service, assemble components and more. The clients earn wages for their work while gaining valuable work experience in an environment that works with them to achieve their goals. The work opportunities are specially selected and designed for people with disabilities so that each client is trained and supported toward success.

In addition, the enrichment and day programs offer clients activities, educational opportunities and care in an environment where the staff and caregivers are providing specialized programming designed for each client's individual needs. Overall, each of these organizations has a common mission to create opportunities for people with disabilities to live full, productive, happy lives in our local communities.

With a mission like that, it is no wonder that the founders, leaders and staff of these companies approach each day with a unique passion for the things that they do.

We are fortunate to have great organizations like HCS, VARC, SOC and GreenCo in our communities to provide opportunities for people with disabilities. Every family that is connected to one of these organizations, whether as an employee or a client, is passionate about the work they do.

Unfortunately, there have been proposed rule changes at the Federal level of our government to make significant changes related to sheltered workshops that would impact each organization's ability to providing meaningful work and services to their clients. Primarily, the Federal government wants to force sheltered workshops to pay their clients the minimum wage, or more, for their work as well as adding unrealistic pre-qualifications in order to allow a client to work.

While these changes may seem reasonable at first glance, further consideration exposes that these rule changes would massively impact the operational models at all of the organizations that serve clients in our communities. Massive changes could put these organizations out of business and this would be a tremendous loss to our communities and the clients they serve.

The reality is that most of the people who work as clients in sheltered workshops are not in it for the money. Yes, the paycheck is a source of pride and contribution; but more than anything, the work and teamwork experiences far outweigh the financial reward. It is my hope that Federal officials will talk to clients, families and organizational leaders alike to assess the actual impacts of these rule changes. I know that they will find strong, stable, positive organizations with passionate leaders and happy clients if they visit southwest Wisconsin.

Again, as we celebrate Tom Schraeder's semi-retirement from Hodan, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the leaders, staff, families and clients who work in sheltered workshops throughout the 17th District. Your compassionate service is a tribute to the spirit of our communities and the commitment to the value of every individual. Thank you for your service and continuing efforts to create opportunities for every person to be the best that they can be.

For more information and to connect with me, visit my website <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/17/marklein> and subscribe to my weekly E-Update by sending an email to Sen.Marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov. Do not hesitate to call 800-978-8008 if you have input, ideas or need assistance with any state-related matters.

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