It was a little over five years ago when Josh Reuter and Kelly Merchant asked the University of St. Thomas School of Law to consider hiring someone through Kaposia to work at the law school. It was the first time I’d heard of this organization, and as they talked, I just knew that Kaposia meshed perfectly with the law school mission of service and community. We worked with Josh and Kelly to identify potential job duties within the law school and they went back and identified a suitable candidate. They told me they had the perfect person.

I met Sue Lang over lunch on a warm fall day. Sue was quiet at first, but soon began talking about her job at the Radisson hotel, where she had worked for over 20 years, and how disappointed she was when her job was eliminated when the hotel was sold to another company.

Sue’s first duties at the law school were to perform simple administrative tasks such as restocking the classrooms with markers and erasers, emptying recycling bins, keeping the kitchen tidy and watering the plants. But Sue isn’t content unless she can find additional ways to help, and soon she added monitoring supplies and placing orders for the faculty assistants and dean’s office, helping with mass mailings and copying to her daily routine. She also expanded her classroom duties to include the library study rooms and the law school clinic, where she keeps the interview rooms in tiptop condition. We increased her time from once a week to twice a week to accommodate these extra duties.

Through the years Sue and I have become friends and have met outside of work for a meal, to attend Mass or just to hang out. We joke that we must be related because our growing up years were so similar.

The law school has a ceremony every spring to recognize students, faculty, alumni and staff who excel in representing our mission. Two years ago, Sue was given a Mission Award for Excellence in Service and Community. I was the lucky person who got to present her with a plaque and tell the community how her contributions had made her an easy choice for this award.

It’s been nearly five years now, and I still remember that lunch in September. Josh and Kelly told me, “You will absolutely love working with Sue!”

Truer words were never spoken.
Labels Are For Cans...

from the desk of the CEO

JON ALEXANDER

It may be a small thing, but it’s consistent with our core values which always focus on the person we serve and not on our organization. The people we serve are why we exist. If we lose sight of that, even in the small things, then we lose sight of what’s really important.

Mike and Mike

by Scott Stivers

“Every day for the past eight years, Mike Keprios has eagerly waited for his Kaposia van driver, “Mike the Driver”, to pick him up and take him to work.” ~One Step Ahead, June 2010

And, five years later, thirteen years in all, that statement still holds true. Over the years, Mike and “Mike the Driver” Barger have established a rapport that helps Mike feel comfortable and successful. Being visually impaired, Mike doesn’t like surprises. It is important to him that there is a place for everything, and everything is in its place. That includes his van and driver being there when he needs them!

Considering how important consistency is to Mike, it has been fortunate that “Mike the Driver” has stayed on his route. Strangely, there seems to be something about this particular route, or driver, or van, that attracts men named Mike. According to “Mike the Driver”, including himself, there have been a total of six “Mikes” who have ridden his route. At one point, there were five at once! It’s important to keep a good sense of humor and camaraderie on the 100-mile round trip each day!

The two Mikes continue their relationship, more than just passenger and driver, with jokes, discussions of pepperoni pizza and listening to the radio. They have become good friends.

Dependability is one more way that Kaposia “invests in the prosperity of individuals who have a disability.”
one step ahead...

SUCCEED

Walk for Wheels
Helping EVERYONE with Disabilities
by Scott Stivers

For almost ten years, Meghan Boucher has been, in her own words, “helping everyone with disabilities and Kaposia” by Walking for Wheels. “She’s really competitive,” says Katie LaCroix, and her competitive edge has made Meghan one of the most successful fundraisers the Walk for Wheels has ever seen. Her secret? Hitting the pavement! Meghan attributes her high performance to canvassing her neighborhood of over 100 houses, and tapping into her network of family and friends, at work and at church. Lynn Phillips, who has worked side by side with Meghan, knows that she is committed to the cause. “Meghan told me once that she raises money so her friend Margaret can get a ride to Kaposia,” says Lynn, “Meghan thinks of others first.”

Kaposia’s transportation services play a vital role in getting people to work, and to activities in the community. Besides getting to her own job, Meghan enjoys going to the library. Meghan’s friend, Margaret, takes advantage of the swimming pool at the Courage Kenny Rehabilitation Institute thanks to transportation provided by Kaposia. Meghan jokes and laughs with her drivers, particularly Kyle and Tony. “They’re both nuts,” she says.

The money raised at the Walk for Wheels helps keep Kaposia’s current fleet of vans available to Meghan and her friends. It also helps purchase newer, more accessible lift vans for Kaposia’s growing number of customers, who use wheel chairs. It gives Meghan a huge sense of accomplishment to help out. If you ask her, she’ll tell you she singlehandedly raised enough money to buy TWO lift vans. But, when all is said and done, “helping everyone with disabilities” is Meghan’s top priority when she “Walks for Wheels”.

Meghan is also gracious and grateful for all of the support she receives. Once, after a particularly effective year of fundraising, Katie drove with Meghan to her church in a brand new van, just to show the folks there what a huge impact their donations had made for people who need a lift. She’ll admit that it’s fun to go outside for a walk. She’ll even get a glimmer in her eye when she thinks about the accolades she gets for being one of the top fundraisers every year. But, when all is said and done, “helping everyone with disabilities” is Meghan’s top priority when she “Walks for Wheels”.

Congratulations to Anne Schwarz who, on May 10th, will have 25 years of successful employment with BankCherokee. Twenty five years is a significant anniversary that not many are able to achieve in their career. Reaching this milestone is an awesome accomplishment, but when congratulated, Anne made light of it.

“It’s easy to work that long at a place where you truly love what you do,” she said.

Anne went on to say she loves coming in to work and seeing all her friends and performing her job duties that include delivering mail, shredding, putting coins in the proper trays and some light cleaning. She said her secret for success is, “I work as hard as I can every day, because I want to make sure they know I appreciate everything they have done for me”.

Terry Frankfurth has been Anne’s supervisor for over 15 years. “Every morning when Anne comes in, she has a smile on her face and always is so welcoming to both staff and customers. She also has a good memory and seems to know everyone. We are truly lucky to have her as a Bank Cherokee employee.”

Anne is also The Kaposia Walk for Wheels champion! She has raised more money than anyone else for the Kaposia’s Walk for Wheels benefit. Anne said that she loves helping Kaposia because they helped her land the position at BankCherokee. She added “It’s important for me to help Kaposia so they can help others that are in need like I was 26 years ago!”
**A Career is Launched**

Connor was a student referred by his school, South Education Center (SEC) last year, to be part of Kaposia’s competitive employment grant with the Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities. The grant serves students during their last year of school. SEC knew Connor, who identifies himself as being on the Autism Spectrum, was someone whose path would not be typical and felt that Kaposia’s Discovery Process would be a great fit to direct his talents toward success. Connor’s situation was unique from the beginning. He showed his Career Consultant Liz his architectural designs which were clearly innovative and demonstrated his talents.

Through the process of Discovery, Liz quickly learned that Connor’s talent was genuine. He was enrolled in architectural drafting classes at Hennepin Technical College, and his teacher there confirmed that Connor had an eye for design that made him a natural. Connor planned to continue his postsecondary education toward earning a certificate in architectural drafting and wanted a job that would supplement his education and utilize his talents. Connor was very specific, initially, about what he wanted to be doing and had a difficult time seeing himself start at a more entry level position.

After several months of informational meetings, Liz and Connor visited the Parade of Homes and met a custom home builder. After talking to Connor and looking at a portfolio he’d put together, the builder agreed to an informational interview. He took the time to explore Connor’s abilities and he could see how Connor could be a fit for his business. As a test, Connor was offered $75 for three hours of work altering blueprints based on customer requests for changes. Connor also was told that the builder was interested in incorporating some of Connor’s unique designs into his custom homes if Connor continued to work for him. For Connor, it was a golden opportunity. He did a good job altering the blueprints and had the opportunity to perform work that could open doors to an exciting career. The last obstacle was acquiring the architectural software program used by business. His team collaborated on finding a solution and after exploring a number of options, found a way to purchase the software. One of Connor’s ideal conditions of employment was to be able to work remotely some of the time and to avoid situations that can be challenging for him.

Connor has accomplished a lot since he completed his school program at SEC. He will finish his 2 year certificate in architectural drafting in the near future, and he is working toward having some of his architectural designs become real homes. The future looks bright for this talented young adult.

**Joining the Saints**

Sometimes the Discovery Process takes more time than we would like, and often the results are worth waiting for. Eric Ferguson loves sports and has both paid and volunteer experience as an athlete and coach to underscore that interest. He recently landed an informational interview that led to a job that, according to Eric, is “Awesome and a Grand Slam!”

Eric, and his Career Consultant Sean Spooner, recently had an informational interview with Project Explorer, part of Burnsville Community Education. The head of the project remembered Eric as a student participant and was eager to connect with him again and to help him find a new job by using his personal contacts. That help led to an informational interview with Annie Huidekoper, VP of Community Partnerships & Customer Relations with the St. Paul Saints, and her colleague Emily Vickers, Manager of Fan Services and Community Relations. Eric did the rest.

Annie and Emily were so impressed with Eric’s experience, energy and positive attitude that they wanted him to join their team for the 2015 baseball season. The informational interview turned into a job offer. This spring when the St. Paul Saints start playing in their new stadium – CHS Field - in downtown St. Paul, Eric will be there welcoming fans with his magnetic personality as he passes out programs.

During the process of setting up informational interviews, Sean had told Eric that one of them would eventually result in a job. He said he was sorry that there hadn’t been a job offer yet. Eric responded in characteristic fashion saying, “Stay positive!” That positive attitude is one of Eric’s strongest attributes, and visitors to the CHS Field will have the pleasure of experiencing it firsthand. Play ball!
One of the many gifts of the Discovery Process is that it leads to learning new things about a person and opens up new and exciting possibilities not previously considered. That was true for Thomas Robinson.

Thomas is a bright, caring individual with an innate genius for navigation and directions. He has interests and skills in art, travelling, helping people, social interaction and public speaking. Despite his natural talents, communication has been a significant limitation.

Since childhood, Thomas has had speech issues. His voice is often difficult to hear and to understand. For most of his life, Thomas has been asked to repeat himself and to speak louder and clearer. Often, after multiple attempts to share what he is trying to say, others will awkwardly nod and move on. These interactions have often left Thomas and others feeling frustrated and fatigued.

That changed when his Career Consultant, Kandy Hagen, visited Thomas at church where, to her surprise, Thomas was leading the entire service. She realized that Thomas was loud and clear over the church’s amplification system. She started to observe other times when it was easier to hear and understand Thomas and often a technological device was present. That realization has opened up exciting new possibilities and opportunities for Thomas.

Thomas and Kandy contacted the Minnesota STAR program to learn more about adaptive equipment. STAR stands for “A System of Technology to Achieve Results” and its mission is to help all Minnesotans with disabilities gain access to and acquire the assistive technology they need to live, learn, work and play. With the help of STAR and PACER Center, which has an extensive technology center, Thomas had the opportunity to borrow Chatter Vox, a personal voice amplification system. The results have been life changing.

Communication and interactions are now more natural and fluid for Thomas. As a result of this communication aid, Thomas speaks up more and shares his thoughts and ideas. The Chatter Vox has enabled Thomas to take the lead during informational interviews and better communicate his many talents with potential employers. The device is still on loan (and he is exploring iPad software programs to use for note-taking and further developing his skills), but there is no turning back. Thomas’s many talents and abilities are now front and center, and Thomas is on a roll.
Kaposia invests in the prosperity of people with disabilities and the profitability of our partners.

Kaposia has helped thousands of individuals with disabilities through innovative job development and retirement services. Individuals with developmental disabilities have enjoyed meaningful work and engagement in the community because of the work Kaposia performs. But to work in the community or to participate in the community you have to get to the community. Our fleet of vans has grown over the years to meet the needs of the people we serve.

Kaposia operates a number of vans to accommodate our customers and we drive a lot! Kaposia put more than 378,196 miles on its vehicles last year and used almost 27,000 gallons of gas. To give you some perspective, driving 378,196 miles is comparable to driving from St. Paul to Anchorage Alaska over 100 times!

On May 2nd Kaposia will be holding its annual Walk for Wheels at Central Park in Roseville. As part of our efforts to promote the event, Kaposia has developed a new 378,196 advertising campaign. Our hope is to raise awareness of how many miles we put on our vehicles as well as explain why donations are so important.

Kaposia is encouraging all its supporters to set up their very own Walk for Wheels web page to help raise funds to purchase a new van. You can follow the link and instructions through our website at http://www.kaposia.com/w4w2015. If you’re less tech savvy or not into website style fundraising you can always print off the fundraising sheet from the Kaposia website.

You can be the one to help make the difference and help Kaposia raise money for a new van or maybe even two!

For more information please contact Josh Reuter at jreuter@kaposia.com or 651-789-2830.