

MASWM

Dignified and meaningful employment for people with disabilities...Quality services for Missouri.

Author To Address MASWM Annual Meeting

MASWM will host author and activist Amy Lutz, PhD, for its annual meeting April 24-26. The event will be held at Margaritaville at Lake of the Ozarks, and Lutz will speak to the conference April 25.

MASWM is also inviting others to create a national dialogue on workshops and employment for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. More information will be shared as it's available.

Lutz has an adult son with severe intellectual disabilities, and she has been a vocal supporter of 14(c). She is the author of "Chasing The Intact Mind: How The Severely Autistic and Intellectually Disabled Were Excluded."

Her writing about severe autism has been featured on many platforms, including Psychology Today, The Atlantic,

Slate and Spectrum. Her first book, "Each Day I Like It Better: Autism, ECT, and the Treatment of Our Most Impaired Children," was published in 2014, and her second book, a collection of essays called "We Walk: Life with Severe Autism," was published in October by Cornell University Press. She is a founding board member of the National Council on Severe Autism (NCSA) and is currently pursuing her doctorate in the history of medicine at the University of Pennsylvania.

Lutz is also a historian of medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. She serves as vice president of the National Council on Severe Autism and lives outside Philadelphia with her husband and five children.



Author and activist Amy Lutz, PhD., will address the MASWM Annual Meeting April 25.

Workshop Day at the Capital Planned in Jeff City



Missouri legislators spoke with workshop staff at the 2023 Workshop Goods and Services Day at the Capital. The 2024 event will be Jan. 24.

For the third consecutive year, workshops from across Missouri will visit Jefferson City for MASWM's Workshop Goods and Services Day at the Capitol from 10:00 a.m. to 1 p.m. (set up is at 9:00) on Wednesday, Jan. 24.

The third-floor rotunda, Senate side/east side, of the state capitol building has been reserved for managers and staff to display their products and services.

The event is an opportunity for state representatives, senators, staff members and other Missouri leaders to see some of the goods and services offered, produced in, or made by the state's nearly 90 workshops that serve over 5,000 people with disabilities.

Past such events have drawn remarkable reactions, with a frequent comment being, "I didn't know workshops did that..."

The interactions are also occasions for workshop managers and staff to talk with legislators and answer questions about workshop and to discuss legislative issues.

Inside this Issue:

Accommodations Help People	2	Leaders Honored	4	Community Involvement	6
Events Highlight Issues	3	NWMI Partners for Progress	4	Best Practices Nearing Publication	6
		Thrift Store Offers More	5	Employees, Parents Praise Workshops	7
		Workshops Collaborate for Projects	5	Workshops There to Help	8

MASWM

www.moworkshops.org
www.facebook.com/moworkshops/

Workshop Accommodations Help People with Disabilities

Workshops really are unique, and nowhere is this more evident than in the accommodations shops make for people with disabilities.

One of the most widespread examples involves jigs, devices that hold work and guide the employee working on it. The jig may have a stopper that limits the quantity of items for someone having trouble counting. Or they may hold a container in place while they are filled by someone whose dexterity would otherwise make that impossible.

Most workshops use these devices in



Executive Director Kimbal Mothershead looks at Vocational Services' collection of jigs, devices that position work to help an individual with a disability.

MASWM

Officers

President Rob Libera, Manchester/Berkeley, (636) 227-5666 @lafayetteindustries.com

Vice President Jeff Jones, Carthage, (417) 358-6891 jeffjones@carthagews.com

Secretary Natalie Couch, Camdenton, (573) 346-7934 director@lakeareaindustries.org

Treasurer Robert Greenwood, Harrisonville, (816) 380-7359 robert@casco-aw.org

Past President Bruce Young, Columbia, (573) 442-6935 cmsebruce@aol.com

Board of Directors

Area I Byron Myers, St. Joseph, (816) 232-8083 byron@specialty-industries.com

Area II Kimbal Mothershead, Liberty, (816) 792-9553 kmothershead@vserve.org

Area III Heather Pugh, Richmond, (816) 663-3842 heatherpugh@idealindustriesincorporated.com

Area IV Jeff Jones, Carthage, (417) 358-6891 jeffjones@carthagews.com

Area V Connie Thurman, Monroe City, (573) 735-4751 shelteredwork@centurytel.net

Area VI Laura Taylor, Rolla, (573) 364-2883 ltaylor@pci-solutions.net

Area VII Tim Poepsel, Sullivan, (573) 503-0000 tpoepsel@empacgroupinc.com

Area VIII Linda Kimrey, Lebanon, (417) 588-3241 lkimrey@hotmail.com

Area IX Charlie Fischer, Shrewsbury, (314) 781-3999 cfischer@canterburyinc.org

Area X Susan Wallis, Cape Girardeau, (573) 334-9661 susan@vipindustries.com

Mission

Sheltered Workshops in Missouri share a common mission of providing dignified and meaningful employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

If you have questions regarding the Missouri Association of Sheltered Workshop Managers, please contact President Rob Libera – (636) 227-5666 or rlibera@lafayetteindustries.com; or Legislative Chair Kit Brewer – (314) 647-3300 or cbrewer@cuinc.org.

one form or another. Vocational Services, Inc. has dozens of jigs for different jobs and a “catalog” to keep track of them, even detailing how they are built and used. And while most are simple construction using plywood, the results can be dramatic.

“Sometimes a job comes in and it can be as simple as a hand-assembly task, but depending on the severity of the disability of the employee, a jig needs to be created for that employee to be successful,” Executive Director Kimbal Mothershead explained. “The creativity that goes into each jig can be as simple or as elaborate as it needs to be to perform that task.”

Private businesses are rarely ready or able to go to such lengths to accommo-

date an employee. “In some cases, where we would use as a jig, a mainstream business may look at the same task and automate the step,” Mothershead said.

“That’s the reason good jig making is important to extended employment. It creates not only work for employees but an opportunity to be and feel successful in the work they do.”

He noted that staff support is critical. “Our team goes to great lengths watching our employees who are having trouble,” Mothershead said. “They discuss it with each other to figure out what they can do to involve the person in this job. Jig makers are the unsung heroes that we don’t talk about who make a working job easier for many of our employees.”



Molly Moon and Chris Walker from the staff of U.S. Senator Eric Schmitt recently toured Empac Group's workshop in Washington, Mo.

Events Highlight Issues with Lack of Choice

Workshop managers, parents of people with disabilities and others have been increasingly concerned with small but vocal groups criticizing, even attacking workshops.

A common denominator is often this: the critics have not worked in or been served by workshops. In fact, they are often paid staff for organizations that could gain funding if employees with disabilities are forced from workshops and tried to seek alternatives. They criticize 14(c) and urge replacement of workshops entirely by community integrated employment. They seem to disregard data indicating that most workshop employees, especially those with more severe disabilities who need extensive supports, can't meet the demands of private businesses in the community.

Forums Bring Testimony

These trends were evident this fall when the U.S. Department of Labor held a series of "stakeholder engagement sessions" as part of an ongoing review of Section 14(c). Sessions were held Oct. 26, Nov. 1, 15 and 20. Only the session Nov. 15 contained more than a handful of anti-workshop and anti-14(c) voices. The rest were parents, guardians and even workers with disabilities who spoke strongly in favor of keeping workshops and 14(c).

The Nov. 20 event was a good example. Represented strongly by people with disabilities, their parents, guardians and other supporters, they spoke heavily in favor of 14(c). They overwhelmingly

stressed that community employment is not a realistic option for many people with severe and even moderate disabilities. Some had experience with closed workshops and the lack of realistic options.

Several conclusions seemed hard to avoid. It was difficult, even impossible, to find any speakers who have personally utilized 14(c) and workshops and who were also against them. Those critical of the programs appeared to be almost unanimously lacking in direct contact with a workshop. Instead, opponents are employed by organizations that might gain clients and funding if workshops were eliminated. Or they are members of organizations that subscribe to philosophies like complete integration without acknowledging that some challenges are beyond the scope of a private business and the accommodations they would or could make.

Several speakers on Nov. 20 wondered why none of those against 14(c) and workshops seem to use the programs themselves. "I've not heard of one account from someone using the program (that's) calling for the end of 14(c)," one woman said. "They are, after all, the only people impacted by these programs."

Inclusion Questions Answered

Another speaker addressed the accusation raised by some critics that grouping people in workshops is a civil rights violation. One man said it's important to look beyond simple labels and honestly evaluate the desires of those who are in, or have a loved one in, a workshop. He said it's easy to miss how workshops offer safety and work with one's peers – not things that are consistently available in jobs at private companies.

"14(c) forms a system that allows for informed choice," the man added, noting that the negatives of community employment for someone with disabilities can be easy to miss for those not involved. "The purist form of discrimination is forcing people into CIE."

Eric Martin, executive director of Pantheon industries in Wisconsin, said one of the largest questions involves the "promise" that people who lose jobs when workshops close can always find community jobs in private businesses. In states where that happened, many, even

most former workshop employees, remain unemployed and are forced into expensive day programs or, more often, stuck at home watching television. He said Washington state spent \$50 million to replace all of its workshops with community employment, but in the end, only a fraction of the people found long-term work. "Eighty-three percent did not get CIE," he said.

Money Isn't an Issue, Really

Still others said the often-raised issue of wages is simply not a factor. Many parents shared that these employees – their children – do not have a firm concept of money. They love getting their paycheck and the feeling of value that brings, but the amount of money is often irrelevant to them. One speaker cited a young man with multiple disabilities who has been employed by a workshop for 12 years.

"He would not be able to work in competitive employment," the man said. "He generally is not able to speak. And it isn't about the amount of money he makes. Frankly, he doesn't have the ability to understand that. But the workshop is a place where he feels valued and has friendships."

These powerful testimonies included several from Missouri. Natalie Couch, director of Lake Area Industries in Camdenton and a MASWM leader, was joined by two of the workshop's employees, including one who stressed, "I love to work with my friends. My job is hard, but I like it."

Lauren Hall, director of Southeast Enterprises in Kansas City, said that workshop serves 130 people with a wide range of disabilities who have access to an equally wide range of programs. "We have CIE," she said. "But it should be considered a choice in a mix of options."

A parent whose son has worked 29 years at Southeast said closing workshops would be a tragedy. "There is no other choice," she said. "He doesn't understand the dollar amount but enjoys his time here with friends. Without 14(c), his mental state would greatly decrease."

Michelle Beasley is financial officer for Empac Group, Sullivan, where she also has a daughter employed. "Without 14(c), she'd be staying at home, without hope for other employment," Beasley said.



Lake Area Industries in Camdenton recently received three donations totaling \$17,050, including this one from the Lake of the Ozarks Shootout for Empowering Abilities for \$10,300. See Page 6 for more information.

Lt. Gov., Workshop Leader Receive Service Honors

Missouri Lt. Gov. Mike Kehoe and Missouri workshops legislative chair Kit Brewer were honored at Vocational Services, Inc., in Liberty Dec. 13.

The two were named for their efforts supporting Missourians with disabilities.



Missouri Lt. Gov. Mike Kehoe (left) was in Liberty Wednesday to accept honors from Vocational Services, Inc., for his efforts creating a collaborative agreement that helps workshops like VSI increase business. Presenting the award was VSI Executive Director Kimball Mothershead.

At a special event, Lt. Gov. Kehoe received the Legislator of the Year award and Brewer the Working for the Public Good award.

Lt. Gov. Kehoe was recognized for his initiative to link the Buy Missouri Program, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, MASWM, and the Missouri Association of Manufacturers.

Citing the value of workshops, Lt. Gov. Kehoe described the benefit this way: "This collaboration will benefit Missouri's workforce development efforts, while promoting Missouri manufacturing, products and services."

Brewer is the MASWM legislative chair. Working with workshops across the state for many years, he has shown outstanding commitment and dedication to promoting employment options for people with disabilities, working tirelessly on the state and federal level to ensure legislators understand the impact their decisions

have on the lives of people with disabilities.

VSI operates three workshops and other services for people with disabilities in Clay and Platte counties.



Legislative Chair for the Missouri Association of Sheltered Workshop Managers Kit Brewer (right) was honored recently for his efforts to help people with disabilities. Kimball Mothershead, VSI executive director, presented the award.

The Bottles Are Full at Northwest Missouri Industries

Northwest Missouri Industries in Rockport has partnered with Ag Odor Control, LLC, from Fort Madison, Iowa, in a move that recently earned an article in the Atchison County Mail newspaper.

The effort involves bottling a new product, OC7, an odor and stain removal surface cleaner. In a recent announcement, Ag Odor Control, LLC, reported, "We are pleased to announce Northwest Missouri Industries will be labeling and bottling our OC7 spray bottles. We have been working with this group for several years and are pleased to further develop our relationship. The management and staff of Northwest Missouri Industries are wonderful! Thank you for taking this project!"

OC7 is a powerful deodorizer, stain remover and general cleaner while leaving a "clean" smell that's mild. This product does not contain perfumes and does not mask odors. It neutralizes odors at the source in as little as just a few minutes. It is safe for humans and animals when used as directed.



Northwest Missouri Industries, Inc. has received a gift from the Gary G. Taylor Charitable Trust, U.S. Bank, N.A. Trustee, for \$10,000. This distribution is to help replace hanging heaters in the shop greenhouse. NWMI appreciates this support to help ensure meaningful employment experiences for individuals with disabilities who might not otherwise have the opportunity to work. Those at the presentation were (from left, front) David Carroll, board president; Cindy Sons, executive manager; Charlene Didlo, board member; Justin Thiles, employee; (second row) Chris Knowles, employee; and Lisa Cooper, assistant manager.

Thrift Store Offers Bargains, Learning and More

Since opening in August of 2022, the RISE Racks Thrift Store has become a favorite destination for shoppers near Warrensburg who are looking to find a great deal and support a great cause.

The store is designed to provide individuals with disabilities skill-building jobs in a supportive, safe and challenging environment. The employees are supported by full-time staff who emphasize personal growth. In addition to hands-on retail skills such as cleaning, designing displays, sorting, tagging, time manage-

ment and register payments, individuals are also provided the chance to develop soft skills such as customer service, conflict resolution and interpersonal communication through daily interactions with their coworkers and the community.

RISE Racks has grown from just five vocational employees to 20, working over 250 combined hours a month. In addition to the retail store, over 30 employees are working over 750 hours a month at the RISE Vocational Center drop-off site where community donations for the store

are sorted and prepped for sale. That's a 400 percent increase in the retail workforce alone in only 16 months.

RISE Racks' relationship with the community extends beyond the drop-off center. Staff regularly host tours for local high school students where they have the opportunity to learn about the RISE mission, as well as see behind the scenes at both the vocational center and the retail store. Recently, a group from Holden High School was given the tour by Community Specialist, Cindy Wade.

Beyond educational tours, RISE Racks also offers assistance to families. Seeing a demand in the community, a voucher program was created to aid those in need. Recipients can redeem vouchers directly in the store. During 2023, 45 families were able to obtain needed clothing and household items through the program.

Tiffany, an employee who works in the retail store and helps sort items in the vocational center, thinks one of the best parts of working with RISE Racks is the social aspect. "I like being around people," Tiffany said. She has also learned "to be patient and to get along with people."

RISE Racks plans for continued growth in 2024, building lasting relationships with the community and providing even more support and growth opportunities for individuals with disabilities across Johnson County.



Tiffany enjoys sorting donations at the RISE Racks Thrift Store in Warrensburg.

Workshops Collaborate for Big Projects to Help Businesses

Missouri workshops provide a host of services for businesses in the state and even across the country.

Sometimes a potential job is larger than what a single workshop can tackle by itself, so they collaborate with other shops to take the work. In one recent example, six shops cooperated to complete the well-known veterans Buddy Poppy project, a year-long effort that involves millions of individual poppies.

John Walsh, plant manager for Empac Group in Sullivan and Washington, coordinates the effort which began last year. Besides Empac, other shops include Warren County Sheltered Workshop, Phelps County Industrial Solutions, Opportu-

nity Sheltered Industries, River Bluff Industries and Lake Area Industries.

"We want to add two more shops," Walsh said. "Last year we did 6.5 million poppies, and this year we're looking at 8 million. It's really grown."

The effort is unique in other ways. Walsh noted the project came through a workshop in Lawrence, Kansas that was visited by a former Empac staff member, Colleen Himmelberg. "They needed help doing the project, so they reached out to us," Walsh recalled. "We helped show them how we do it with our time studies and other techniques." Another former manager, Eric Gebler, is now consulting with shops in Kansas on the "Missouri

Model" and other strategies.

While the poppies are steady work, they may not last. Walsh said the contract is expected to go to Indonesia next year. Although that's a significant loss, he's seen ups and downs before during his 30 years and is confident that workshop teams will find more work for people with disabilities. "I love my job," he said. "I wouldn't want to be anywhere else."

Natalie Couch, director of Lake Area Industries and secretary of MASWM, said shops have collaborated like this before and will continue to do so. "It can really expand our capabilities," she said. "It gives us a lot of flexibility."

Community Involvement Takes Many Forms

Lake Area Industries in Camdenton recently received three donations totaling \$17,050.

The gifts came after workshop employees, staff, board members and supporters helped with three events: the Lake of the Ozarks' Got Talent, Lake of the Ozarks

Shootout, and the Knights of Columbus Tootsie Roll Challenge.

Workshop Executive Director Natalie Couch said the activities are just some of several community activities the workshop joins in regularly.

The Laurie Sunrise Beach Rotary Club

organizes Got Talent to provide an affordable, family-friendly event and raise money for three area charities, including LAI. Couch helps on the planning committee, and employees help with the concessions, trash and other support. This year, one of their employees was a judge of the karaoke contest.

The Shootout is a huge boat race at the lake the weekend before Labor Day. Thirty-nine charities around the lake volunteer to pull off all of the activities and events throughout the summer, and this year the event raised \$675,000! All the proceeds are given back to the charities that help, based upon the hours they put in volunteering. LAI always helps with the two poker runs, assists with the hamburger and hot dog tent, traffic control at the street meet and the Christmas tree lot.

The Tootsie Roll Challenge raises funds for agencies in the community that serve people with disabilities. LAI collects donations at local grocery stores in exchange for a tootsie roll the first weekend in October each year.

The funds LAI received from these events will go directly to the employees in the form of Christmas gifts, quarterly attendance rewards and the employee positive behavior reinforcement store.



The Camdenton Area Chamber of Commerce recently helped Lake Area Industries celebrate 40 years in business with a ribbon-cutting ceremony in conjunction with their open house. The 123 people attending included LAI board members, staff and employees, chamber staff and board members, as well as many local community and business peers. The ribbon was cut by Linda Platter, the longest serving LAI Board member of 32 years, and her daughter, Tina Platter, the longest-employed worker with 33 years.

MASWM Best Practices Manual Set for Distribution

The year 2023 brought revitalization to the Missouri Association of Sheltered Workshop Managers Training Manual, now called Best Practices.

Dawn Cox (DOCO), Charlie Fisher (Canterbury Enterprises), Byron Meyers (Specialty Industries) and Heather Pugh (Ideal Industries Incorporated) were tasked with revising and rewriting a Missouri Association of Sheltered Workshop Managers Best Practices Manual. The hope of the project was to create a resource that managers can quickly find answers to arising questions to successfully complete tasks.

"It was an exciting project that created

huge collaboration," Pugh said. "While the four of us were tasked with writing the manual, we were able to gather ideas and practices from managers across the state."

The writing process not only allowed for collaboration, but collectively gathered input and interest from all workshop managers during the MASWM Spring Conference. This provided insight on important information needed for each manager to be successful.

Fisher noted the process was also eye-opening. "While I have been a manager for years, there are still things that pop up that I have questions about," he said.

"We wanted to create a unified resource for both new and seasoned managers that could guide best practices and hopefully make daily life a bit easier."

The manual was written in a digital format with easy-to-use links to online resources. While not an easy task, the project is complete, and plans are to distribute it to each manager in January of 2024. "The hope is that Area Directors and MASWM's new mentor program will utilize the Best Practices Manual as a training guide, creating the expectations and consistent use of best practices throughout the state," Pugh said.

Employees, Parents See Value of Workshops

Opinions about workshops are varied, but some of the most relevant come from the people with disabilities who work there, and the parents and guardians who care for them.

Two workshops, Canterbury Enterprises and Empac Group Employment Resources, recently sought comments from employees and parents. In their words, here are some samples:

- This job means that I have a place to go and make my own money to use for whatever I need to make my life easier for me. It also gives me the chance to meet new people and to learn what it means to work and how hard it is to make a dollar and be with my friends and make new friends. It gives me something to do and I like working. It also gives me a sense of independence.

- I am writing to let you know just how much the sheltered workshops mean to me, as I have a grandson who is employed there. I went on a guided tour one morning and when we were finished, the person asked me what I thought of the workshop. I was at a loss for words at that moment because I was trying to keep from crying. I told her that this was the most amazing and wonderful place for my grandson and the others. It gives them something useful and gainful to do with their time and the abilities that they do possess, instead of sitting at home doing nothing and feeling like they are not a part of something or contributing to something of some importance. I could tell by watching them perform their jobs that they were proud and enjoyed what they were doing. They also had friends there. People they could relate to and have a comradery with.

Canterbury (Enterprises, St. Louis) provides a safe working environment for my brother with Down Syndrome. With the help of the staff, he is able to learn new skills and successfully complete his work. He is also in a friendly environment that promotes socialization with his peers. He is very proud of the work he does at Canterbury and has been working there for 10 years.

- Cindy benefits greatly from Canterbury. She takes pride in the work she does. She's interacting with her fellow employees. When she hasn't been able to come to work, usually due to being ill, she gets very bored at home. For us especially, Canterbury is located close to home so getting to work is easy. Supervisors are very helpful to the employees. If a job is too hard for someone, which has happened in our case, they go out of their way to see what is available for her to do. All in all, we are both very happy with Canterbury.

- My son completed two separate programs to train him in competitive employment. He worked two summers through the SWEP (Summer Work Experience Program). He was employed at Schnucks grocery store in Bridgeton and at Monsanto (now Bayer). He did not have the skills necessary to be successful at either of these places. He was also evaluated by the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, and they also found that he did not possess the skills necessary for competitive employment.

- For my son, Canterbury Enterprises has been a godsend. It allows him the ability to work in a non-stressful environment. (His coach at SWEP noted that he could bag groceries on the express line

but would become mildly agitated when a big grocery order came through the regular checkout line.) He is always so proud of his paycheck, even though he has no concept of the actual amount. He just knows when he has enough to take us out to dinner. He beams with pride when he opens his wallet and pays the wait staff by himself.

- Canterbury helps our son with stability which keeps his behaviors at a minimum. He enjoys having a purpose in life. Canterbury helps our son learn new trades and also with his language. At this time, he cannot be in competitive employment. Canterbury is a place for our son to feel a part of the community. He very much enjoys going to work each day. We are grateful he has this opportunity.

- I love working at Empac (Sullivan and Washington). I do different jobs. I am very busy. I help other people do their jobs. I have money to spend. I get up early and ride the bus. My drivers keep me safe on the road. I am very happy.

- Canterbury Enterprises offers our daughter a safe place where she can work to the best of her abilities and be a productive member of society. Her working contributes to her self-esteem, sense of empowerment, and feeling of making a difference while allowing her opportunities to be with her peers and earn a small wage commensurate with her abilities. We have always been grateful for her chance to work at Canterbury with the wonderful staff and varying jobs she gets to try.

- My daughter, Desiree, is employed at Empac Industrial Resources, a sheltered workshop in Sullivan, Missouri for 12 years - began employment after high school graduation. She has grown up so much, thriving working in a safe environment for persons with disabilities. She earns good wages and has learned several skills working in a production area. She is a hard worker and enjoys her job. It gives her purpose and meaningful employment. If the workshop closed due to elimination of 14(c), she would be unemployed, staying at home, with no hope of other employment, along with so many other persons with disabilities.



Employees at RISE in Warrensburg are learning new skills since the opening of a thrift store operated by the workshop. For more information, see Page 5.

Workshops: There When Needed for People with Disabilities

Here's a story that involves a woman and her efforts overcoming a disability. It's also a story of sheltered workshops and how they perform unseen but important roles.

Workshops are often seen as stepping-stones to community integrated employment. While that is true, many with intellectual and developmental disabilities find workshops a safe, structured environment that offers a more permanent solution. For some, workshops are also parachutes, a place to land if a community job with a private company doesn't work out.

A Complex Story

When she was young, Carla was an employee in workshops operated by Southeast Enterprises in Kansas City and, after moving to Clay County, Vocational Services, Inc., which operates workshops in Liberty and North Kansas City.

She enjoyed the work and being around others. But after a time, she decided to pursue employment with a private business, and she was hired by a fast-food restaurant. That worked well, but when COVID hit, the restaurant job ended, never to return.

Fortunately, Carla was able to rejoin VSI in the fall of 2021, but she continued to look for outside employment. That came in the form of another fast-food restaurant, where she obtained a job bussing tables.

A Good Fit, At First

Carla's sister and guardian, Teresa Millan, shared that Carla loved the restaurant business, often talking to customers and enjoying time in the kitchen. "Everybody loved her," Millan said.

MASWM Website

The MASWM website at moworkshops.org offers extensive information on workshops, their services and more.

Among the highlights is background on the people we serve, various programs and related information. There's also a database of workshop services and a list of MASWM events.

Millan and others began to see some problems, however. Carla did a great job at the restaurant, but she was happiest and most successful when the VSI job coach could be with her. At 61, she was also dealing with increasing challenges from aging.

When the restaurant cut her hours, it seemed a good time to make a change. Notably, Carla did not want to attend a day center but to keep working. "She didn't want to be at the day program," Millan recalled, adding that the many, lower-functioning adults might bring a less challenging environment and cause her to regress. "We decided we wanted her to be out."

The workshop was the perfect solution. "We decided it would be better to move back to VSI," Millan said.

A Good, Then a Great Fit

Although it wasn't easy at first, the results at the workshop have been positive. "They have been wonderful working with her," Millan explained. "When she first started, she struggled a little bit — she'd be upset over noises or something. But they worked through the issues; the staff has been wonderful. They give her time to rest if she becomes fatigued. It was a safe space for her."

Millan also addressed the issue of Carla's earnings. "She's happy with the money," Millan said with a smile. "She loves money. She doesn't need a lot, but earning it is something she likes. And she's interacting with everyone there. That's great for her."

Pool Playing Jokester

Carla also has an active life outside of work. She lives with a roommate in a supervised apartment program where she often decorates ceramics or items like a



Carla worked hard at community jobs with private businesses, but when she need additional support the businesses couldn't provide, a sheltered workshop was available to provide an option when she wanted to keep working.

football helmet with paint. Her roommate likes crafts, so they make a good pair. Carla also likes to play a golf game on her phone and is reported to be a sharp pool player. She also likes practical jokes.

"She's a jokester," Millan noted. "She likes to play jokes on people." For example, there's been several reports of a rubber snake suddenly appearing before unsuspecting VSI staff members.

Carla also enjoys traveling and was preparing to go on vacation as this article was being written. "She likes travel," Millan said. "She loves to stay in a hotel and have a big bed!"

All of this helps explain why the VSI workshop was the perfect match for Carla at this point in her life. "It really came out well and then got better," Millan concluded. "They (VSI staff) have been fantastic for her."

Most importantly, Carla agrees. "I like it here," she said.