

MASWM

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

Workshops Are Meeting Challenges, Providing Opportunities

The past year has been a challenge for Missouri workshops that provide employment and other services for state residents with developmental disabilities. The good news is that shop management, staff and employees with disabilities have overcome them.

COVID has been a major threat, especially for employees who often deal with other health issues that can increase their risk from the virus. Missouri workshops have made countless physical and procedural adaptations to keep their workers safe. Other organizations, including MASWM and DESE, helped with this as well.

Workshop contracts with private businesses were also impacted by COVID. These contracts for services like packaging and assembly provide over 50 percent of workshop budgets. By pursuing every option to keep business coming through their shops, managers and staff were able

to continue providing employment that also brings socializing, vocational training and more for people with developmental disabilities.

An ongoing challenge involves a small group whose anti-workshop stance sometimes has a big impact. A larger but unfortunately related group is focused on minimum wage increases and other laudable goals. Neither party understands or cares that “one size fits all” approaches could eliminate employment options that have served workers with disabilities for 70 years.

A strong response to this comes from grassroots organizations like A Team Missouri. Comprised largely of parents and other supporters of people with disabilities, A Team and like-minded groups know firsthand the benefits of workshops for their adult children with disabilities,

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Missouri workshops receive some of their most important support from parents and their adult children with disabilities like these two at an A Team Missouri event.

Passing HB 432 Matters for People with Disabilities

By Kit Brewer, MASWM Legislative Chair and Executive Director of Project CU in St. Louis

For more than 60 years, men and woman with disabilities have been afforded the opportunity for employment and skills training from community employers utilizing an FLSA 14c certificate. Missouri's Extended Employment Sheltered Workshop Program (EESWP) receives oversight and support for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MO DESE), Office of Special Education.

Currently, 87 businesses are involved in

the EESWP, employing nearly 5,000 individuals with significant disabilities. The vast majority of these individuals have been identified with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD). This broad spectrum of diagnosis can be a substantial barrier to Competitive Integrated Employment – jobs in the community with private employers. Our program provides the accommodations and supports necessary for these individuals' success.

Today's Reality

Despite this, there continues to be a concentrated effort to eliminate FLSA

14c providers nationally. This movement is based upon a lack of understanding, both of the program benefits and of the diversity of the disability community. Disability is not a monolith.

A variety of accommodations are needed to enable and facilitate an individual with a disability to enter into employment or other facets of life. What were once seen as insurmountable barriers and limitations are now more readily overcome and accepted. For the I/DD community, even greater supports and accommodations are necessary for suc-

(please continue to next page)

Inside this Issue:

Gov. Parson Tags Workshop	3
Engaged in Outreach	3
Missourians Join National Celebration	4

Ava Shop Hosts Legislators	4
Teamwork Avoids Highway Issues	5
Grant Funding for Monroe City Recycling	5
Awareness Month in St. Joseph	6

Kirkville Shop All In for Recycling	6
BCI Marks Amazing Year	6
KC Workshop Targets Job Growth	7
Longtime Leader Enters Retirement	8

Passing HB 432 Matters for People with Disabilities

(continued from Page 1)

cess. One such accommodation is the commensurate sliding wage scale available under 14c.

Commensurate wage is a highly regulated calculation designed to pay every individual fairly, regardless of his or her skill and production levels. Individuals may be paid at various levels along that sliding scale, calculated specifically to their productivity. That rate may be above or below the minimum wage and may differ for one type of job or activity to another, but it is always specific to an

individual's skill and productivity levels. Individuals no longer need to feel pressured by the failure to achieve unattainable goals and minimum production levels. Their jobs are secure, at their own ability level and pace.

In addition to the sliding scale wage, individuals receive the directed support and attention that they need to achieve their employment and training needs. This support provided by well-trained and knowledgeable staff is rarely, if ever, available from private employers.

Protecting Opportunities

With all of this federal activity, MASWM has sought to protect and solidify our position within the state of Missouri. Senator Karla Eslinger (33) worked with our legislative team to create SB 582. This bill would authorize the Missouri Department of Education to create a Missouri Commensurate Wage Certificate that would continue the ability to offer these same accommodations

and a commensurate sliding wage scale under state authority, if FLSA Section 14c were ever discontinued.

The bill language was eventually attached to HB 432, sponsored by Hannah Kelly (141) as part of a larger omnibus package. HB 432 was passed unanimously with bipartisan support and glowing testimony from both sides of the aisle and signed into law by Governor Parson.

The new Missouri law gives some measure of security to the employees participating in Missouri's EESWP organizations. Passage was met with interest by advocacy groups from around the nation anxious to see if their states could pass similar legislation.

Missouri continues to be a leader in providing this opportunity for successful employment to the I/DD community. Our employees, parents, advocates and organizations wish to say "Thank you" to the entire legislative body.

MASWM

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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.



What were these guys doing at Specialty Industries in St. Joseph? Go to Page 6 to learn more!

Workshops See Challenge, Opportunity

(continued from Page 1)

and their support is not surprising. Missouri workshops in most cases were founded by parents who recognized the need more than 50 years ago.

MASWM contributes as well by helping workshop managers share ideas and deal with individual challenges. One example involved a company managing highway rest stop contracts for MoDOT. When the firm went bankrupt, MASWM helped ensure the solutions included a fair

shake for shops providing this service. This was especially important because the workshops included some of Missouri's smallest shops in rural communities where industrial packaging and other business services are almost nonexistent.

More than anything, workshops have continued providing services for people with disabilities, Missouri businesses and the communities where the workshops are located. It's a job they are committed to continuing.



Missouri Governor Mike Parson received a Christmas card and bicentennial ornament from the employees at Gateway Industries in Eldon. Gov. Parson responded by hanging the ornament and posting on the shop's Facebook page: "I want to thank the team at Gateway Industries of Eldon for the Christmas card and Missouri Bicentennial ornament. Looks great on our Missouri State Capitol tree!"



MASWM Remains Engaged in Federal Outreach

By Kit Brewer, MASWM Legislative Chair and Executive Director of Project CU in St. Louis

One of the MASWM's strengths is its continued outreach and attention to legislative issues that may affect its membership and the individuals that we serve and employ.

Missouri's Extended Employment Sheltered Workshop Program (EESWP) has long been successful in providing employment and skills training to individuals with disabilities. The EESWP includes a series of organizations spread throughout Missouri, and each is a 501(c)3 small business. These businesses are integral parts of the local communities and economies.

Grassroots Organizations

Because of this unique structure, local communities have a personal relationship with their local workshop. These personal relationships have also been shared with elected officials at both the local and state levels and our Missouri federal delegation, many of whom still value their ties to their local workshop.

This Missouri model, referred to as the "Missouri Difference," is unique in the national landscape of FLSA Section 14c service providers. In addition to the local community ties, Missouri's funding model and state oversight are also unique. While most programs nationally are Medicaid funded, Missouri's program receives oversight and funding through the state Department of Education, Of-

fice of Special Education. Additional funding is also available to many shops from local taxing entities known as Senate Bill 40 Boards.

National Dialogue

This unique foundation may insulate many here in Missouri from the national conversation on 14c, commensurate wages and facility-based employment (sheltered workshops). Nationally, sheltered workshops and commensurate wages are seen in a very negative light. There is a strong push to eliminate 14c, and more than a dozen states have either ended this employment option or have started timetables to eliminate it.

Elimination of commensurate wage options and the personalized care and accommodation provided by facility-based employment is particularly detrimental to men and women with the most severe limitations, many of whom are on the Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) spectrum or those dealing with mental health issues.

MASWM's legislative team has a long history of educating and advocating for our employees to continue with a full menu of service options, including continuation of sheltered employment. Our certified workers and their families have spoken glowingly and overwhelmingly in support of their freedom to choose.

Our Efforts

MASWM contracts with 535 Group, LLC to assist in providing federal outreach. The 535 Group is comprised of

seasoned professionals from both sides of the aisle. They, along with our legislative team, have taken dozens of meetings with house and senate members and their staff.

During this past year, we have made great progress in extending our outreach and contacts well beyond our Missouri delegation. In July we also became affiliated with the newly formed Coalition to Preserve 14c, a national advocacy group. I sit on the Coalition Board of Directors as well.

Among the bills and issues that have arisen are HR 2373, the Transformation to Competitive Employment Act, two different Reconciliation Bills which contained language negative to 14c, a Civil Rights Commission report and an incident in which more than 30 Missouri workshops were incorrectly dropped from DOL certificate listings. The current Reconciliation Bill, HR 5376, the Build Back Better Act, contains \$300M in grants available to states that end 14c by 2025.

Our tact continues to be a proactive approach, educating elected officials on the benefits of 14c and, more specifically, on the effect that it has on the I/DD community. Our due diligence and advocacy are crucial to ensuring options for these men and women seeking a meaningful and successful experience in employment.

Missouri Workshops Join National Employment Celebration

Missouri workshops joined shops across the country in celebrating National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM).

Celebrated each October, NDEAM is led by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, but its foundation is at the grassroots level across the nation, including throughout Missouri. Equally important, the decades-long push to provide employment for people with disabilities is just as important today as it was when few opportunities existed.

For people with developmental disabilities, those opportunities include much more than "just" employment. MASWM President Rob Libera shared that work skills are only part of the issue. "The social skills, the training and the work they take pride in – those are really significant," explained Libera, who works as executive director of Lafayette Industries in Manchester. "But a lot of times what

they also love is the people they know and feel comfortable with."

In Missouri, just under 90 workshops employ nearly 5,000 people with disabilities. These shops, technically labeled "extended employment sheltered workshops," are actually nonprofit small businesses. Most of the people they employ have one or more developmental disabilities, ranging from moderate to severe. Almost universally, they love their work and the people they work with.

The work they perform ranges from packaging and assembly to manufacturing custom products. Many shops operate thrift stores, greenhouses or other locations to market their work. Still other work includes "community employment" conducted in cooperation with private businesses that employ people with disabilities while the workshops provide training, support and a ready backup should the community employment not work out. Other outside work involves



crews that provide maintenance services at many Missouri highway rest stops. Again, if this outside job doesn't work out, the employee can easily return to the workshop and try again later.

National Disability Employment Awareness Month can be traced back to 1945 when Congress declared the first week of October to be "National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week." "Physically" was dropped in 1962 to include people with all types of disabilities. In 1988, Congress made the commemoration a month-long event.

DOCO Hosts State Legislators for Special Event

DOCO in Ava hosted Missouri State Senator Karla Eslinger and State Representative Travis Smith for the workshop's fifth annual Thanksgiving luncheon on Tuesday, Nov. 23.

Both of the officials toured the facility, learning about new and longstanding departments. They also enjoyed deep-fried turkey before being joined by community members.

During the tours, DOCO employees told Sen. Eslinger and Rep. Smith about their jobs. The legislators also learned about DOCO's new Lead with Kindness T-shirt department and the employees' goal to educate the world about celebrating their diagnoses and to implement Lead with Kindness in their actions.



Both visitors were impressed by DOCO employees and the work they do on a daily basis. The two noted the importance of sheltered workshops and the choices given to employees with disabilities for safe, dignified and meaningful employment.

The Thanksgiving luncheon is in its fifth year and is offered to the community, customers and vendors for free. DOCO and its employees served almost 300 people from the area.

Great Teamwork Avoids Problems for Highway Maintenance

Workshop managers, MASWM leadership, state legislators and the Missouri Department of Transportation may have set some kind of record for cooperation following a serious threat to workshop contracts for maintenance and janitorial services at highway rest stops.

The effort involves 14 Missouri workshops and their employees with disabilities who provide maintenance services for Missouri highway rest stops. Most of the shops are relatively small and located in rural areas with little industrial development, so the work represents a significant employment opportunity.

While workshops have provided the services for many years, MoDOT began using a private management firm to contract and direct the work about 10 years ago. That generally worked well until 2021 when new contracts, and then a

bankruptcy by the management company threatened to derail the efforts. A new firm was brought in but several questions remained, including proposed changes to workshop contracts.

MASWM took immediately action, using its network with legislators and MoDOT to ensure continuity for both the valuable highway services and employment for people with disabilities.

"It was a team effort all the way across," explained Linda Kimrey, MASWM board member and CEO of Laclede Industries in Lebanon. She also praised the new management company for their flexibility. "They were accommodating and understanding," she said of the firm. "It took a while, but it worked out."

Several individuals deserve attention. Kimrey's shop is one of those involved,

but she also stepped up to help lead the effort when Ginger Williams, general manager of Missouri Community Improvement Industries in Farmington, needed time to care for a loved one. Earlier efforts were led by Susan Trump, who retired last summer as manager of United Services in Bethany and MASWM transportation chair. Geoff Shackelford, Director at Unlimited Opportunities in Boonville, MASWM President Rob Libera of Manchester and Berkeley, and legislative consultant Lynne Schlosser played significant roles as well.

"Standing firm as a group helps," Kimrey concluded. "Workshops are independent businesses and in some situations competitors, but we've learned that we can accomplish more by working together."

Grant Funds for Recycling Equipment at Monroe City

Monroe City Sheltered Workshop has used funding from a special grant to purchase a new paper shredder. In 2021, the workshop applied for a solid waste grant through the Mark Twain Solid Waste Management District and was awarded \$18,787.50.

The Monroe City Sheltered Workshop has offered paper shredding services since 2009. With the purchase of a new shredder, they are able to keep up with the consistent flow of paper for recycling.

"We are very pleased to now have a large shredder to be able to shred more paper. Also, when someone wants to come in and watch their documents being shredded, we are able to do it much faster for them," said Connie Thurman, director of the workshop.

"The district is thrilled to work with the Monroe City Sheltered Workshop to obtain a new paper shredder. It is a much-needed service in the region," said Ashley Long, district planner for the Mark Twain Solid Waste Management District.

The Mark Twain Solid Waste Management District Region G is funded by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources and is governed by county commissioners from seven counties, including Monroe County Commis-

sioner Mike Minor. Administration for the district is provided by the Mark Twain Regional Council of Governments located in Perry.

This grant was partly funded by the

Missouri Department of Natural Resources, the Mark Twain Solid Waste Management District and Monroe City Sheltered Workshop.



Officials gathering to celebrate the recent recycling grant for Monroe City Sheltered Workshop were (from left) Missouri Sen. Cindy O'Laughlin, Monroe County Presiding Commissioner Mike Minor, Mark Twain Solid Waste Regional Council of Governments Planner Ashley Long, Monroe City Sheltered Workshop Manager Connie Thurman, and workshop board Treasurer Reginal Miskell.

Specialty Industries Marks Awareness Month

Specialty Industries in St. Joseph combined two important events this year: celebrating National Disability Employment Awareness Month and holding their Annual Employee Recognition Day.

The special day also included an open house and tours. Mayor Bill McMurray presented a proclamation during the ceremony, and over 100 employees were recognized for service from five to 25 years!

The St. Joseph Chamber of Commerce joined the event with a ribbon cutting for the remodeled breakroom for employees. A local artist, Chris Fleck, painted a Kansas City Chiefs mural in the breakroom, and he also joined the

festivities.

Specialty Industries recognizes National Disability Employment Awareness Month each October to commemorate the many contributions of people with disabilities to America's workplaces and economy. The theme for NDEAM 2021, "America's Recovery: Powered by Inclusion," reflects the importance of ensuring that people with disabilities have full access to employment and community involvement during the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

More information on Specialty Industries can be found at their website: www.Specialty-Industries.com or by calling 816-232-8083.



Employees at Specialty Industries now have original art by Chris Fleck that adorns their breakroom.

Kirksville Workshop Goes Big for Recycling

Community Opportunities, Inc. Sheltered Workshop in Kirksville has been busy with several forms of recycling.

Executive Director Arthythe Curtis reported that the workshop was able to purchase additional recycling equipment and now is involved in collection and

shipping of recycled materials, including old, corrugated containers and newspaper.

Other improvements at Community Opportunities include a facelift to a kitchen/breakroom, repainting the sub-assembly shop and adding a memorial wall of deceased employees. A large photo bulletin board has been entitled "This Is Us" to display photos of employees, special events and activities.

The shop also gave the exterior of the building a facelift, painted the exterior outside recycling bay and car detailing doors and beams. The car detailing area

is now more efficient with updated equipment.

Community Opportunities implemented an "employee wellness program" providing and educating employees about healthy food and snacks. The shop is proud of their employees, the work they do and how they help contribute to the community.

"We have increased our staff to meet the expanding workload and hope to continue with the growth in 2022 as we add plastic recycling," Curtis said. "We are proud to say we are the largest recycling center in Northeast Missouri."



BCI Chalks Up Amazing Year in Multiple Areas

BCI, located in St. Charles and Lincoln Counties, provides employment to over 300 adults with disabilities. Providing a continuum of opportunities allows individuals to navigate their employment desires in a self-directed manner.

The shop's two packaging and assembly facilities provide jobs to 250 adults. This supported work model has seen substantial growth with the integration of more automation on their production floors. An essential partner of many global brands, including manufacturers of cleaning products and pet foods, BCI's organizational employment program is the

foundation of their mission. It is often the first step to employment training for adults with disabilities. Due to the increased growth, they have also been privileged to outsource work to neighboring workshops.

With many businesses struggling to maintain staffing, 2021 was an opportune time to highlight the amazing work ethic and abilities of adults with disabilities in the competitive work market. BCI's competitive employment program has increased fivefold from what it was before COVID. Adults with disabilities are supported through Vocational Rehabilitation

and the BCI team for job matching and Supported Employment Follow Along. In 2021, this created 24 new employment opportunities working 30+ hours a week and earning wages averaging \$16.00 an hour.

BCI's Skills Center is a vocational training facility specifically for adults with disabilities. Participants learn the soft and hard skills of employment directly in the business partner's model. Current businesses in partnership with the Skills Center include True Manufacturing, Embassy Suites, Distribution Management, and Barnes-Jewish HealthCare.

Southeast Enterprises Works Hard to Provide Jobs

Southeast Enterprises in Kansas City continues to navigate the pandemic, and rigid safety protocols have kept the facility virus free.

Associates have their temperature recorded as they enter the building. They are required to wear a mask during the workday, go through proper handwashing exercises and practice social distancing to prevent the spread of the virus.

Southeast remains committed to keeping our associates safe and healthy through protocols and PPE requirements, which has resulted in a healthy and safe workplace.

Southeast Enterprises continues to prospect new business clients during the pandemic, acquiring several new local and regional contracts. The job opportunities include inspecting, packaging materials, labeling, assembly and kitting a variety of products and equipment.

One of the new clients provides first-aid materials and supplies to school bus and transit companies across the nation, while a second provides safety equipment to several large domestic and international railroads. Onboarded in September, Southeast's newest client supplies

domestic and farm animal testing supplies to veterinarians in North America and countries around the globe. This animal health company has invested in Southeast Enterprises with a three-year commitment and a large financial contribution to be allocated over two years. As this business relationship grows, Southeast has been told that the teams' efforts, story and images will be featured in their company's internal communications to acknowledge the business partnership.

As the pandemic ebbed and flowed, traditional clients sometimes waned, so the workshop faced a need to explore new options. Southeast turned to a new category: the cannabis industry and medical marijuana. This new business is expanding at a fast pace and needs workforce and service teams quickly. Because of this, Southeast established Associates on The Move (ATM) where several members of the team work on-site providing a variety of services. Southeast associates have helped with plant care, trimming and bud care along with janitorial service teams. Southeast Enterprises currently has relationships with an area hemp farm, two medical marijuana grow



Dwjuane M. demonstrated counting product using a jig during a tour of Southeast Enterprises.

facilities and two manufacturers, with several more business relationships on the horizon.

Last summer, Southeast Enterprises had the pleasure of hosting a tour of the facility for retired Missouri State Representative, Jim Barnes, Jackson County Executive Dan Tarwater and Missouri Association of Sheltered Workshop Managers President Rob Libera. Lauren Hall, the CEO of Southeast Enterprises, introduced the three to Southeast associates to watch and learn how the work performed by the workshop benefits people in the community and across the nation. The Southeast team enjoyed their time with the trio and wanted to thank them for their time invested in learning about the workshop.

Southeast Enterprises is committed to working toward strengthening its programs, increasing staff and providing continuing support to associates. Offering employment five days per week to persons with I/DD in a variety of high-quality assembly and packaging projects for local and international businesses is one goal reached.

For more information about our COVID practices or continued job growth, please contact Lauren Hall, CEO, at 816.353.2704 or email: lauren@southeastenterprises.org.



Southeast Enterprises recently hosted several visitors for a tour of the Kansas City area workshop. The visitors included Jim Barnes, retired State Representative; Rob Libera, MASWM president; Lauren Hall, Southeast Enterprises CEO; and Dan Tarwater, Jackson County Legislature.

Longtime Disability Services Leader Enters Retirement

Recognized around the state and Washington, D.C., an area advocate for people with disabilities retired Dec. 30.

CEO Randy Hylton celebrated his last day after 46 years with Vocational Services, Inc., a Kansas City-area nonprofit that provides employment and other opportunities for people with developmental disabilities.

A graduate of William Jewell College, Hylton's career in many ways mirrors the history of employment for people with disabilities. His story began in early 1975 at VSI's first location in North Kansas City, one of Missouri's early workshops first launched in a former hair salon. Later that year, Hylton was on hand for building Liberty's first workshop, the first of two Liberty locations that, along with North Kansas City, would eventually serve more than 200 people with disabilities.

People First

Even during workshop construction, Hylton enjoyed working alongside people with disabilities. VSI employee Jack Smith, who became widely known as a Liberty High School athletic trainer, worked on the project, too. He and Hylton were friends until Smith died in 2013.

"The people were what drew me to VSI," Hylton now recalls. "They were so real, so personable and friendly. It was just natural to want to be a part of that."

Named VSI's executive director in 1993, Hylton initiated a number of changes. He led VSI to its first national accreditation by CARF and helped bolster a parent organization, giving formal voice to a group that had been behind workshop creation in VSI's area and

throughout Missouri.

"There's always been a lot of people involved in workshops that weren't always obvious," he noted. "It's important they have a way to be involved."

New Programs

A major change involved opportunities for people with disabilities outside of workshops via "supported" or community employment with private companies. The jobs were especially good for employees with moderate disabilities who benefited from the support of a job coach and the workshop "parachute." If the community job didn't work out, they could return until they wanted to try again. VSI became the first workshop in Missouri to launch a supported employment program.

"I thought, there is no reason we can't offer both workshop and community employment," Hylton said. "I'm proud to have provided that service. It made a difference to the people we serve."

Another change involved those challenged to meet state guidelines for workshop employment. Hylton devised a plan where these workers could receive extra training in work and social skills.

Outside Challenges

Despite all of this, not everyone appreciated workshops, and some actively campaigned to close them. That was one reason Hylton became active in the Missouri Association of Sheltered Workshop Managers (MASWM), eventually serving as the group's vice president, president and legislative chair.

"There were a lot of things happening," he recalled. "There was a lot of pressure to do away with workshops."

While new challenges have arisen, posi-



Longtime MASWM member Randy Hylton has retired after serving as a workshop manager, association president and legislative chair.

tive steps were, and continue to be, achieved. Workshops, once an often-overlooked resource, are better known. Along the way, Hylton has testified before the Missouri Senate, worked with state and national advocacy groups and even faced grilling on television as he made points that aren't always popular.

"Those who question the value of workshops don't realize how many people are involved," he explained, citing grassroots support from parents, including many who helped found workshops.

Needed Voices

Others who are overlooked can be surprising. "Most of all, there are the people with disabilities," Hylton said. "We must ask, 'What do they want?' I think a lot of people forget that question. They don't realize how much the employees enjoy their time at work with their friends, working with their peers and the other benefits of the workshop environment."

Hylton said he's not certain what he'll do, although reading is definitely included. "I've already been gifted three books," he laughed. "I guess I have some reading to do." He also plans to spend more time with his family, but he doesn't plan to worry much about VSI.

"I feel we have a very good crew in place," he said. "We were able to bring them on and give them time to make the transition. I'm very proud of them."

The Skills Center at BCI in St. Charles and Lincoln counties is a unique facility specifically for adults with disabilities. Learn more in the complete article on Page 6.

