

WEEKLY FOCUS

Ohio | Opportunities for Ohioans
with Disabilities

Kevin L. Miller, Executive Director

February 28, 2014

The mission of the Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities Agency is to ensure individuals with disabilities achieve quality employment, independence and disability determination outcomes through integrated services, partnerships and innovation.

State of the State Events in Medina County

One of the best parts of being the director of a state agency is the chance to travel the state of Ohio and to meet the great people who make a difference in their communities every day. I had just such an opportunity this past Monday.

As I noted last week, we partnered with the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) and the Medina County Board of Developmental Disabilities (MCBDD) to host a series of events in Medina County leading up to the Governor's State of the State Address. These events focused on the Employment First Initiative and on the challenges and opportunities faced by people with disabilities in the workforce. After a day filled with great events DODD Director John Martin and I, along with key staff from both agencies, came away impressed with the people of Medina County.

We started off our day at the Wadsworth Community Center - a wonderful resource and a great example of community collaboration. We stopped by the city's TV station (WCTV) facilities to tape some Public Service Announcements (PSAs) highlighting the importance of employment for everyone in the community. We



Director Miller (second from left, back row) and DODD Director John Martin (fourth from left, center row) are surrounded by self-advocates during filming of PSAs to promote community employment.



OOD Commissioner Jermaine Brown (center) participates in a round-table discussion with self-advocates.

captured some great video that will help us share our message of inclusion and empowerment in the local community and across the state.

During the taping, we met some of the impressive self-advocates the MCBDD had brought together.

After the PSAs these advocates then joined local business, community and government leaders for an "Ability @ Work Summit" to discuss the impact of state initiatives and the challenges and opportunities for people with disabilities in the workforce.

Local leaders shared details on the collaborative process that led to the creation of the community center. It really is a great example of how to leverage resources and stretch tax dollars while also serving the community in innovative ways. It was exciting to see how the Café integrated people with disabilities into their workforce and in turn served the community.

Self-advocates Ryan Cash and Courtney Jordan eloquently shared their stories and provided great feedback on what is working and what challenges remain for those seeking to enter the workforce and build a successful career. This was followed by an engaging discussion as small groups talked about the opportunities and challenges people with disabilities face. It was refreshing to see business, community and government leaders and staff talking across the table about how to better meet the needs of their communities.

After an excellent lunch at the Soprema Café, we headed to the MCBDD facilities for a meeting with the Local Leaders Employment First Pilot Project, the dedicated leaders who are working to plan and facilitate implementation of this important initiative at the local level.



Director Miller accepts a painting from some of the children at the Medina County Board of Developmental Disabilities.

After a quick look at the impressive facilities of MCBDD, Director Martin and I were touched to be presented with paintings personally created by Windfall school students at the Achievement Center. Seeing the smiling faces and the excitement of the students (from preschool to high school) was a good reminder of what our work is all about. For me, it is moments like this that make all the hard work worthwhile. I will proudly display the painting in my office area.

It is fitting that we would wrap up our trip touring local businesses committed to hiring people with disabilities. We visited Buehler's Fresh Food's impressive Medina River Styx store. We were able to take a tour, talk with staff about integrating people with disabilities into the store's workforce, and discuss with Ryan Cash his experience working at Buehler's.



Buehler's Medina/River Styx Store Manager Jack Rohrbaugh accepts a commendation from OOD Director Miller (left) and DODD Director Martin (right). (2014 Photo/© DODD/Chandel Charles — in Medina, OH)

It provided a great example of the benefits of employment integration. Buehler's is rewarded with a dedicated employee committed to hard work and on the job training. The employee receives employment and the rewards that go along with a paycheck and a steady job. The state of Ohio adds another productive worker and taxpayer, and the local community is strengthened in the process.

After Buehler's, we moved on to another very impressive local business focused on fresh food: Sandridge Foods. Sandridge HR Director Dale Fortner spoke passionately about the company's commitment to the highest quality fresh foods that enhance the reputation of their customers but also about how integrating people with disabilities into their workforce helps their business as

it grows. We were able to tour their incredible state of the art facilities and see their commitment first hand. It is hard to believe how many potatoes they process every day! Unfortunately, taste testing is on Tuesdays.

Because of their dedication and commitment, Director Martin and I were proud to present both Buehler's and Sandridge Foods with a certificate of recognition from our agencies for their commitment and work with people with disabilities.



Dale Fortner of Sandridge Food Corp. accepts a commendation from OOD Director Miller (left) and DODD Director Martin (right). (2014 Photo/© DODD/Chandel Charles — in Medina, OH)

It was a fitting way to close out the events leading up to the State of the State Address. As Governor Kasich made clear in his speech that night, the bottom line is about helping people and serving our communities. It is about jobs that bring security, stability and the opportunity for growth.

It was good to once again be reminded of the important work that happens in communities across Ohio every day and the wonderful people who make it happen.

Kim Miller Joins OOD

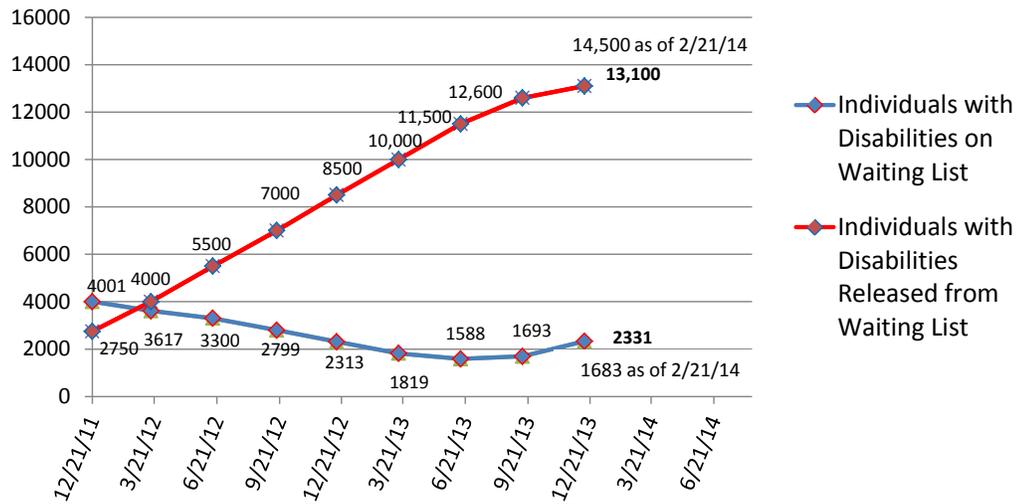
We would like to welcome one of our newest additions to OOD, Mr. Kim Miller. Kim started his tenure with us on February 24 as the Assistant Deputy Director for the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation and will be responsible for field operations for the VR program.

He comes directly to us from the Union County Board of Developmental Disabilities where he served as Superintendent since 2006, and he brings over 37 years of experience in the field of service to individuals with disabilities to this position. Kim's experience includes both local and statewide responsibilities within both the public and private sectors.



Kim Miller, OOD BVR Assistant Deputy Director, joins a round-table discussion with self-advocates on the Medina trip.

Number of Individuals with Disabilities on Waiting List



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