

# Guthrie Center does more than 'a lot'

By Tom Hamilton

Now that I've been at the GO Center for a few months, I am frequently asked the question, "What do you all actually do there?" My initial response is to just say, "a lot," but that doesn't really tell the story. So, allow me to take a few minutes to explain the Guthrie Opportunity Center and what goes on here. It can best be described as several partnerships focused on providing training and employment opportunities for people with developmental and intellectual disabilities in our community. These partnerships have a tremendous effect on the individual participants, their families, and the entire community. Thus our motto, "Work That Changes Lives"!

Our most important partnership is with Communicare, Inc. They've provided training and employment opportunities for our developmentally disadvantaged adults for years with Nelson County Industries. There was such a demand for these jobs that they continually outgrew their facility. When local civic and government benefactors stepped in to raise funds for this 80,000 sq. ft. facility, the GO Center was born! It's now a partnership that has served up to 200 members of our community and their families. Local industries have contributed by providing contract work for our participants, so everybody benefits. Isn't that the way communities are supposed to work?

The patrons who came together to purchase this facility formed the Guthrie Opportunity Center Foundation and is now guided by a Board of Directors who share the mission of changing lives. The Board began looking for additional opportunities to provide jobs and vocational training and formed the second partnership with the creation of On-The-GO Foods. They wanted to create a top flight lunch and catering business that not only provided long term employment for our participants but also served the working professionals in our community with a quick and healthy alternative to fast food. Today, On-The-GO Foods has two locations and serves over 200 salads, sandwiches, and soup prepared by our participants each day. A little-known fact is that On-The-GO Foods also prepares 500 meals per week for the Nelson County Meals From the Heart program. The Meals From the Heart initiative provides meals five days a week to the elderly or shut-ins who can't get to the grocery or food pantry. Volunteers drive all over this county, knock on doors, check on their clients, and hand deliver a nutritious meal for every weekday. Our participants preparing meals for shut-ins and the elderly delivered by community volunteers - how about that for a partnership!

Once the GO Center Foundation got on a roll, partnerships began to spring up all over the place. The area school systems partnered with the GO Center to create the Triumphant Program, an educational program for high school students to introduce them to vocational skills, work co-op experiences, and employment opportunities at the GO Center when they graduate. A greenhouse and garden center began when a local business couple donated the Country Gardens store to the GO Center. What a treat it was for our Triumphant students to plant the ingredients of a garden salad and enjoy eating it six months later!

Another partnership with the City of Bardstown allows a recycling center to function in our building. Our participants sort and select plastics, paper, cardboard, and aluminum cans to be picked up by our recycling vendor daily. A local start up business, ReBart Bottling LLC, began working with a few of our participants as employees. They have now grown into a large self-sustaining company that is located within our building with an entire workforce comprised of special needs adults. The GO Center benefits from the space ReBart rents inside the building, but the real winners are the students from Nelson County and Bardstown Schools that benefit from the training and coop opportunities initiated by ReBart's President, Renea Bartoszek. That's the way vocational training is supposed to work!

So now, when people ask me what goes on at the GO Center, instead of saying "a lot," I tell them, a community coming together to help each other. With partners like our local school systems, our business leaders, and local government, the Guthrie Opportunity Center truly does change lives!