

CHUCK WILDE NAMED



2008

SELF-ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR

Charles (Chuck) Wilde is the 2008 Self-Advocate of the Year in Central Alberta.

Merv Rockel, Vice-Chair of the PDD Central Region Community Board, presented the Doreen Befus Award to Chuck on June 5 at the *Speak Up Speak Out* conference in Red Deer Lodge.

The award recognizes adults with developmental disabilities who have made outstanding contributions to their communities, but people who know Chuck say he deserves the honour for the personal challenges he has overcome as well as his good deeds.

Tanja Baker, Citizenship Involvement Coordinator at Michener Services, and Lorne Hallet, a Behaviour Management Consultant with PDD Central, nominated Chuck for the award.

"The growth I've seen in him over the last few years has been amazing," Tanja said at the conference.

Chuck is Vice-Chair of the POWER Council at Michener Services. Although he has been a member of the council since its inception almost 10 years ago, he was initially reluctant to join and limited his participation to helping make coffee. Lorne remembers Chuck lacked self-confidence and had a reputation for mischievous tendencies.

After taking Leadership Today training, however, he became active in the self-advocacy movement. He is now a leading member of the POWER Council and has helped the group do everything from raise money for the United Way to plan a municipal election forum.

Tanja also credits him as the inspiration for the Peace Tree Day held June 2 in Red Deer.

"He's always the first person to sign up for something. He wants to help all the time. He's so dependable, too. If he signs up for something, he carries through on it," she says.

Lorne believes POWER Council gave Chuck an opportunity to realize his potential as a leader. "It helped him feel validated for who he is and how he thinks about things, and to overcome some of the feelings of inadequacy he's had in his life."

Tanja says Chuck has learned how to speak up in a positive way, not only for himself, but for other people too. He has become an advocate.

It can also be said that he has stepped into the spotlight. Chuck is a member of the Rights Learning and Theatre Group, a troupe of actors with developmental disabilities who write and perform plays educating people about respect and human rights.

He appeared in the musical *Dry Heave: A Town on the Edge*. This was a joint production by *artsparks* and Treehouse Youth Theatre featuring a mixed cast of teens and adults, most of whom came to appreciate Chuck's personality and sense of humour.

"When I witnessed the final presentation of *Dry Heave*," Lorne says, "I was amazed at how many of the Youth Theatre group came over to hug him and wish him well. He obviously made quite a favourable impression on many people."

Just as obviously, he impressed members the PDD awards selection committee, yet Chuck himself may have been the most surprised person in Red Deer Lodge when his name was announced as the 2008 Self-Advocate of the Year.

"I never had this award before. I was really scared," he said later.

Now that he has won the award, he's pleased. "I'm proud of myself," he says. "I worked for this a long time. We (POWER Council) do good work."

Canada Safeway Awarded 2008 Group of the Year

Employers who hire adults with developmental disabilities might get someone who isn't capable of doing the job at hand or someone who needs special attention – just as they might if they hire adults *without* developmental disabilities.

Likewise, employers who hire adults with developmental disabilities might get someone who is loyal, reliable and capable of doing more than the job at hand, just as they might if they hire adults without disabilities.

This has been the experience of Parkland Safeway in Red Deer, winner of a PDD Central Community Recognition Award as Group of the Year for 2008.

“Just give them a chance,” store manager John Larsen advises. “They may require a little more attention – some of them – and others don't require any attention at all. It's no different than any other of the employees in the store. Some we give more direction to than others. That's the nature of this business.”

Parkland Safeway, which has 128 employees, has had as many as nine individuals with developmental disabilities on staff at one time. It currently has five. John inherited the employees when he became manager June 1, 2007 and gladly continues the tradition of hiring adults with developmental disabilities.

“Right after I got here, one (recently-hired) person just wasn't capable of doing what we wanted him to do, so we moved on and we ended up with another person. That's part of the retail business these days.

“There are certain employees (with developmental disabilities) that I can't imagine not being here. I gave one up to one of the other Safeway stores here in town because he lived close to it and that was quite a loss to this store. I didn't want to let him go, I tell you. When you get a good employee these days, you want to keep him.

“I've got applications from two others and I will certainly try to fit them in as openings arise.”

One employee with a disability has worked at the store for nine years and another has been on staff for eight. John says this kind of longevity isn't typical in the retail grocery business. Some grocery

stores he knows have an annual turnover rate of 50 per cent.

One of the long-time employees with a developmental disability is on leave right now to work out some personal issues. He isn't the first employee to have problems and he won't be the last, John notes, and he won't lose his job because of it.

“As soon as he's better, he's back. He has his job waiting. We work closely with our human resources department to make sure that happens. It's the same thing for any employee. If someone has a problem, then we get them on an employee-assistance program right away.”

Parkland Safeway works through Employment Access and EPSS to find and train employees with developmental disabilities. Some come with a job coach who helps them learn the job, while others learn without special assistance.

John says the store usually ends up with a loyal employee, someone who is happy to have the job and enjoys coming to work.

“I think getting to know them is one of the biggest rewards – just getting to know them as people. Some of them I've met have an outstanding sense of humour. They're just fun to be with. They make the work environment that much better.”

One employee came to Safeway after quitting a job where all he got was one menial task after another. John understands his frustration.

“It was sweep the floor, sweep the floor, sweep the floor. Here he does a variety of things for us, as much as we can get him to do,” he says.

“It would be easy to take somebody and say, ‘OK, your job is to keep all the buggies off the parking lot’ so they would never come inside. That's not what we want to do. The interaction with the customers is key so that our customers can see that they're trying.

“I've had a lot of customer comments where they say, ‘You know, we didn't think this was going to be a great experience with that bagger, but thank you, it was a great experience and that's an incredible person you have working for you.’”

David Murphy awarded 2008 Ed Johnston *Citizen of the Year*

David is a Managing Partner of Toma Roma's restaurant in Red Deer and has been instrumental in providing job opportunities for a large number of persons with developmental disabilities.

David works with individual's key supports to ensure the employees he hires are successful in their positions and he makes a point of giving people the opportunity and guidance to do their personal best.

He is community minded and a positive role model for all who know him. He is willing to help out in the community whenever possible. He leads by example and fosters dignity, equality and respect for others at all times.

Congratulations to David Murphy as the recipient of the 2008 Ed Johnson Citizen of the Year award.

Martin McSween awarded 2008 Volunteer of the Year

Down but not out

How to stay upright is not the most valuable lesson Martin McSween teaches novice skiers; it's more important to him that they learn how to fall. And how to get up.

Martin, a tobacco reduction counsellor with AADAC in Drumheller, won the Gayle Moss Volunteer of the Year Award for 2008. PDD Central chose Martin to acknowledge his many years of dedication and commitment as a Special Olympics coach.

He began coaching track and bowling, but he's probably best known for creating and leading Drumheller's first Special Olympics alpine ski racing team. Martin and his associates teach adults with developmental disabilities how to ski, then how to race if they're interested, and then how to recover from a fall.

"I'll get them to stop and I'll pop out their bindings. 'OK, how do you put it back on?' And then I'll pop out their binding and clip the heel piece and throw it down. 'OK, put your ski on. How do you do it?'"

"And I tell all my helpers, if they fall, don't help them up. Talk them through it. If they need help to get up in a race, then they're disqualified. Some people think I'm tough for doing that, but it's beneficial to them in the long run."

Proof came last year when one of Martin's athletes fell at the 2007 Alberta Special Olympic Winter Games. Coaches cringed and held their breath. She got her ski back on, climbed back to the spot where she fell, went through the gates properly and avoided disqualification.

The skier didn't win a medal, but Martin is prouder of her resilience and determination, "all those things that you saw in these past Beijing Olympics."

"To see that is just so, so good. It gives you such a feeling inside. These guys (skiers) are becoming more self-reliant and if I've helped in any way, cool. They don't need me as much as a coach - and that's why I volunteer."

Martin, a long-time skier, worked in a group home in Drumheller when the city opened a new ski hill in 1993. He asked the residents if any of them would like to try skiing. Two men expressed interest so Martin arranged an outing.

"It turned out there was a whole bunch of people who were interested and they all showed up. I wasn't expecting that. It was kind of chaotic, a real schmozz," Martin recalls.

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"I had to, on the spot, come up with strategies to work with a variety of people. They all had different needs and different cognitive learning skills."

Martin, the skiers and their helpers had a great day "just sliding around." It was so much fun, in fact, that they returned next Friday and every Friday for the rest of the winter.

"Local ski instructors, guys on the ski patrol, and the manager of the hill jumped in and helped and they loved it so much they asked, 'Are you going to do this next year?' I decided OK, but this time it was going to be organized."

A few years later, Martin assembled a team of three skiers to compete in the 1999 Alberta Special Olympics Winter Games in Calgary. Two of the skiers, Tyler and Ken, won medals. The third skier did not.

"Eddie was distraught, so we stopped in Calgary at a picnic table. We got everybody to stand beside it, got him up on the table as if it was a podium, and presented him with his accreditation from the Games as if it were a medal."

Ed was delighted.

Leave it on the hill

'The other thing I like about Special Olympics sport is the fact that you cannot have a competition without a dance. The competition is fierce, really fierce, but at the end of the day, everybody's friends. I love that.'

Tyler won the most medals, three, and qualified for the national games in Ottawa. After moving to Lethbridge, he eventually earned a spot on the national team and was enshrined in the Lethbridge Sports Hall of Fame after winning medals at the World Games in Nagano, Japan. Martin is pleased for Tyler, of course, but also for the unprecedented recognition his achievements brought to Alberta athletes with developmental disabilities.

"They should be accorded the same respect as other athletes," Martin

says. "Yes, they are different, they have different ways of learning, but the techniques and skills are all the same."

Special Olympic racers compete in four disciplines: downhill, slalom, giant slalom and super giant slalom. To qualify, they must be able to go up the lift with minimal supervision, work with any coach and ski a course by themselves.

"The goal of a coach is to set up a system and train a person to be independent of you. That's what I love about Special Olympics.

"The other thing I like about Special Olympics sport," he adds with a laugh, "is the fact that you cannot have a competition without a dance. The competition is fierce, really fierce, but at the end of the day, everybody's friends. I love that."

In the meantime, Ed, the man on the picnic table, recovered from his letdown and competed at the 2003 Alberta Special Olympics Winter Games. This time he won three medals.

"He was pumped! It was great! He wanted to 'medal', it didn't matter the colour. He not only got one, he got three. He was just jingling all the way home."