

Options

A quarterly newsletter of Anixter Center



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A tribute to
retiring CEO
Stuart G. Ferst.
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Spring 2004

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Agency supporters speak out

Editor's note: *At the time of this writing in late April, it is still more than a month until the final status and details of the Illinois Fiscal Year 2005 budget will be known. Therefore, this article focuses primarily on the experiences of Anixter Center's clients as they participated in advocacy efforts in February of this year. Anixter Center will report on how our funding will be impacted by the FY 2005 budget as specifics become known to us.*

Gathered in the media room of the Capitol Building in Springfield on February 18, several individuals who receive services at Anixter Center, their family members and agency board members addressed their peers and others about the dire need for continued and increased funding from the state of Illinois. This small group of committed individuals traveled to Springfield to speak on the day that Gov. Rod Blagojevich announced his proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2005.

In introducing the presentation speakers at the Capitol Building, Anixter Center President and CEO Stuart G. Ferst said, "Illinois has managed to find itself in 47th place among the 50 states in funding community-based services for people with disabilities." (This shameful standing looks even worse when you consider that Illinois is the eighth-wealthiest state.) Stuart also cited the spiraling costs of property and casualty insurance, workers' compensation insurance and other expenses.

He pointed out that advocates have a long and proud tradition of speaking out about funding issues, and



Gwen Brown and her two-year-old son Ronald visited Springfield to advocate for the National Lekotek Center, a division of Anixter Center.

he then introduced the following presenters:

- **Gwen Brown** is a teacher and mother of two-year-old Ronald, who receives services through Lekotek. Ronald has Down's syndrome and cerebral palsy, and if it weren't for Lekotek's therapeutic play-related services, says Gwen, "I don't think my baby would even be here now."

- **Eileen Bennin** is the mother of 31-year-old Stephen, a

participant in the Highland Park-based Adult Community Transition Program (ACT). ACT is an innovative Anixter Center program that assists young adults with disabilities in making a successful transition to life after high school. "Life has changed for my son since he became a participant in ACT," Eileen says. "Thanks to ACT, he volunteers at the American Cancer Society, participates in events at the local library and enjoys having lunch out with peers and friends."

- **Elizabeth Drake Cochran** was a founding parent of the ACT Program. In praise of ACT, she says, "Weaving a tapestry with threads of supportive relationships is our vision for a community that is invested in networking toward job and volunteer opportunities, adaptive continuing education and other opportunities."

- **Michael Lee** has received a variety of services through Anixter Center for 30 years. "I have a life," he says, "and it's filled with vocational and political

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Getting to know you

Independent Living

This article is the fourth in an occasional series that spotlights one of Anixter Center's 70 programs.

Cutting up a piece of fruit or turning a doorknob are everyday actions most of us don't even think about. But for Marva Lattimore, those motions require herculean efforts. Anixter Center's Independent Living Program helps Marva cope with rheumatoid arthritis by providing assistive technology and homemaker services.



Assistive Community Services

"It makes it easier than trying to use a regular knife and going up and down," says Marva, slicing an apple with a specialized knife.

Rheumatoid arthritis causes inflammation and pain in Marva's joints. The disease limits her ability to do the laundry and keep up with the cleaning in her South Side apartment. Since November, Independent Living, in coordination with the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD), has arranged for an aide to come to Marva's apartment regularly.

"It's very difficult for me to do a lot of the cleaning on a regular basis," Marva says. "The place would become very difficult to

maintain if not cleaned regularly. I just wasn't in shape to do it."

Marva relates that she was once trapped in her apartment because she couldn't turn the doorknob.

Independent Living advises on a range of adjustments – from door handles to bathroom modifications to kitchen accommodations – for people referred through the MOPD. Independent Living recently took on the City of Chicago's entire caseload – approximately 340 people – for people under the age of 60 who have a disability but don't qualify for other state or local services. Disabilities include diabetes, heart disease and multiple sclerosis.

"We're out in the field a lot, seeing people in their homes," Donna Crossin, an occupational therapy practitioner with Independent Living, says. "We ask people about their needs and assess how we can be of assistance."

The MOPD, which is funded through federal grants, contracts with Anixter Center to deliver the

Independent Living services. Independent Living staff visit clients annually or as needed to check in and make sure they have the adaptive equipment they need to live comfortably. Services also include referrals for meal delivery and case management – for help with everything from housing, public aid and utility bills.



Independent Living supplies Marva Lattimore with specialized equipment and other services.

Independent Living began in 1991 after the city created the MOPD. Manager Ron Will has been overseeing Independent Living since the beginning.

"It's an important program because it serves people who fall between the cracks," Ron says. "Because the program is specifically geared to a group of people with special and specific needs, the people we're serving don't get lost in the shuffle."

Stop by Anixter Center's booth at

Abilities Expo

August 13-15, 2004
Donald E. Stephens
Convention Center
5555 N. River Rd., Rosemont

**Free admission to
Abilities Expo with
this coupon.**

Link to
Amazon.com
through
Anixter.org

A portion of your purchase
will benefit Anixter Center.

A fond farewell

Editor's note: *Stuart G. Ferst, president and CEO of Anixter Center, will retire on June 30 of this year after 35 years of service to the agency – the past 20 of those as its president. Stuart and Board Chair Rita Bakewell share their thoughts.*



When I came to Anixter Center 35 years ago, I was already committed to the field of disability rights. I'd worked with people with disabilities for nearly a decade and already completely believed in Anixter Center's mission: to assist people with disabilities to live

Stuart G. Ferst and work successfully in the community. The rewards I've reaped at Anixter Center are many, but the greatest satisfactions are seeing people with disabilities living in the community and helping to find employment for people who – others asserted – were not employable. I'm a real "fishing pole" kind of guy. Why give people a fish to eat for today when they deserve the opportunity to fish for themselves?

Anixter Center is successful because of its ongoing search for the newest and best ideas available – its willingness to be flexible and open to creative ideas. There is no question that Anixter Center has the most dedicated and committed staff and board of directors in this field, and they and the clients of Anixter Center will always be with me. The achievements of all of these individuals are evident in the agency's many innovative programs.

The accomplishments of these years are many: the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; a growing number of housing and employment opportunities in the community; the Americans with Disabilities Act; and our success in helping Illinois and the country understand that community services are far superior to institutionalization.

Disability rights advocacy is still a very young movement. There is much important work yet to be done. I look forward to the achievements of the future, especially the closing of all state institutions and the business community's willingness to hire a greater number of people with disabilities. I know that Anixter Center will always be at the center of those achievements, and I have always appreciated the opportunity to be part of it all.

Stuart G. Ferst



Stuart
circa
1969

The talent to lead is a gift and a sacred trust bestowed upon few people. Stuart G. Ferst is one of those few. Throughout his career, Stuart has articulately identified and advanced the causes of people with disabilities and inspired others to strive to accomplish ambitious goals.

While at Anixter Center, Stuart and a dedicated staff have helped the organization evolve from a simple activity center for people with disabilities into an agency that provides more than 70 programs including residential, job training, employment, health care and much, much more. In short, Stuart has brought his vision to life. During the time I have known Stuart, as a board member and now as board chair, I have found him to be a passionate, tenacious fighter for disability rights while also a cool, experienced voice of reason. His winning ways and strength of personality have opened many doors which otherwise may have remained closed to us.

There is no doubt that Stuart has touched all of our lives. Inevitably, we must prepare ourselves for the goodbyes that will occur on June 30. Although Stuart's work may never be complete at Anixter Center, the mission remains constant and the work will, in truth, never be finished. The mark of a leader is the ability to transfer the commitment and will to carry on. Let the leadership and inspiration which Stuart has provided these many years be our guide for the future.

Rita Bakewell
Chair, Anixter Center Board of Directors

Anixter Center is proud to have many supporters in federal, state and local government. The elected officials pictured below have visited Anixter Center to gain a better understanding of the issues facing people with disabilities. We are grateful for their interest in our work.



1. Omar Lopez of CALOR (left) and Ald. Billy Ocasio; 2. State Rep. Barbara Flynn Currie; 3. State Sen. Miguel del Valle; 4. State Rep. Lee Daniels; 5. Carol Woodworth of Anixter Center (left) and State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz; 6. State Sen. Jeffrey Schoenberg and Cathy Lorber of Anixter Center; 7. Former State Sen. Patrick O'Malley; 8. Top row, from left: State Sen. Susan Garrett, State Sen. Jeffrey Schoenberg and Stuart G. Ferst of Anixter Center with State Rep. Julie Hamos (left) and State Rep. Elaine Nekritz; 9. U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky; 10. State Rep. Lou Lang; 11. State Rep. Sidney Mathias; 12. Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan; 13. State Rep. Harry Osterman with an Anixter Center client; 14. State Sen. Rickey Hendon; 15. State Rep. Paul Froehlich; 16. State Rep. Cynthia Soto with an Anixter Center client; 17. State Rep. John Fritchey with Anixter Center Board Member Karin O'Connor; 18. Former State Sen. Kathleen Parker; 19. State Rep. Richard Bradley; 20. State Rep. Annazette Collins; 21. Ald. Bernard Stone; 22. State Rep. Julie Hamos; 23. State Rep. Elizabeth Coulson; 24. Ald. Vi Daley.

Board Q&A

David Jacobs

Anixter Center Board Member David Jacobs is vice president of marketing strategy at Medline Industries in Mundelein. He has been a board member for three years.



What prompted you to become an Anixter Center board member?

I became acquainted with Anixter Center through Fritz Biederman, the agency's architect. He described the organization, and I took a tour. I was very moved by what I saw. I had lived in Lincoln Park for a long time and driven by Anixter Center many, many times without knowing what it was.

Do you serve on any other boards?

I serve on several other not-for-profit boards including the Inner-City Teaching Corps and Goodman Theatre. I am also on the board of a private company, Land O'Frost.

What do you like best about being an Anixter Center board member?

It gives me a chance to make a tangible contribution and to directly get involved with the staff and clients. That level of involvement makes me feel like I'm contributing to the progress of the agency. The more I have gotten to know the agency through clients and staff, the more I've been able to get involved in the mission and see what a wonderful range of services Anixter Center provides.

What is Medline Industries?

We make medical products that we sell to hospitals and nursing homes.

What are your specific interests as a board member?

I would hope more people become acquainted with all the great services Anixter Center provides so it can better attract the funding necessary to support those services and serve the maximum number of clients. I'm very interested in children's services, and I can only imagine how difficult it is for families to care for children who are medically fragile. There's a need that's not well met in the state for high-quality care for medically fragile children and their families.

Get into the swing for children with disabilities at golf outing

Don't wait to make your reservation for the Lester J. Anixter Memorial Golf Outing at The Glen Club on June 29. The event is filling up fast, and it is limited to the first 120 golfers. The deadline to sign up is May 23.

The outing includes a buffet lunch, 18 holes of golf, cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, dinner and awards and prizes. Don't play golf? Join us for cocktails and a

light supper with a companion ticket. Sponsorship opportunities are available. Proceeds benefit the hundreds of children with special needs served by Anixter Center and its divisions: the National Lekotek Center, Chicago Hearing Society and CALOR. Play-A-Round for the Kids in 2004! Contact Nancy Trueblood at (773) 973-7900, ext. 249 or ntrueblood@lekotek.org for further information.

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skills. It's important for me to be as independent as I can be."

- **Betty Matlock** is an Anixter Center board member and a Lake County resident whose 34-year-

old son, Jeffrey, has a disability. He dreams of moving out of his home. Currently, there are no residential opportunities for Betty's son, and she says, "I will volunteer at Anixter Center until some important changes are made."

Philanthropy Update

In support of Anixter Center
Barton Incorporated and its employees

In support of Anixter Center programs
Abbott Laboratories Fund
Omron Foundation

In support of Chicago Hearing Society's Audiology Program
Washington Square Health Foundation

In support of Chicago Hearing Society's Audiology Program and Hearing Aid Bank
Benjamin Benedict Green-Field Foundation

In support of National Lekotek Center programs
Patrick and Anna M. Cudahy Fund

Legislators rescue funding increase

Illinois House Speaker Michael J. Madigan (D-22) recently reached an agreement with the governor's office to keep in place the 4 percent Cost of Doing Business adjustment for community-based service providers like Anixter Center in the state's Fiscal Year 2004 budget.



Speaker
Madigan

"At a time when demand for services for people with developmental disabilities and people with mental illness has never been higher, the state cannot in good conscience cast aside those who depend upon them," Speaker Madigan said.

An Office of Management and Budget requirement that all state agencies hold in reserve 2 percent of their budgets threatened to cut the 4 percent increase in half.

Thanks to Speaker Madigan and our other friends in the legislature for continuing to monitor the state's budget to guard against cuts that hurt the state's most vulnerable citizens and the people who serve them.

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The mission of the Lester and Rosalie Anixter Center is to assist people with disabilities to live and work successfully in the community. Anixter Center is a leading provider of high-quality vocational, residential and educational options, substance abuse prevention and treatment, and health care. Anixter Center is an advocate for the rights of people with disabilities to be full and equal members of the community.

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Stuart G. Ferst, President and CEO

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The Lester and Rosalie Anixter Center is a nonprofit charitable organization with various programs accredited and/or licensed by one or more of the following: CARF, the Rehabilitation Accreditation Commission, the Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Department of Human Services. Anixter Center is a member of the United Way of Metropolitan Chicago and the Illinois Association of Rehabilitation Facilities. Anixter Center is a designated Helen Keller Center Affiliate.

*Assisting people with
disabilities to live and
work successfully in
the community*

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