



Nathan is a dietary aide enhancing the workplace culture at Pearlview Rehabilitation and Wellness Center.

Photography: Benjamin Margala

# Employing People *with Abilities*

*According to the Medina County Board of Developmental Disabilities, employing persons with disabilities is an untapped opportunity. Here's how your company can grow—in more ways than one.*

by Laura Briedis

Chances are good you grew up always trying to find the best in people. The same is also true for a growing number of businesses that hire employees with disabilities.

For Pearlview Rehabilitation and Wellness Center in Brunswick it is easy to see all the positive attributes of Nathan, a



dietary aide who works in the dining room and kitchen, setting the tables, washing dishes, refilling the drink stations among a myriad of other job functions.

More than just having a contagious smile and bringing joy to the rest of the staff, this 32-year-old Valley City resident is self-motivated, detail oriented and very reliable.

"We do not focus on his disabilities, but rather on his abilities," says Susan Harper, Pearlview's director of dining services and the person who supervises Nathan.

Employing people with disabilities has proven to be a sound business practice, thanks in part to the assistance of Medina County Board of Developmental Disabilities. This agency provides training and job placement services to help employees with disabilities become contributing members of the workforce.

As part of its job-matching role, it

identifies employers' needs, finds a good match and sends out job coaches to help employees learn needed job skills—at no cost to the employer. These job coaches work alongside the employees until they learn their specific job functions and then coaches are available afterward for both the employer and employee to consult with at any time.

"Our agency partners with local businesses to help train employees with disabilities so they can become a viable solution to staffing needs," says John Krebs, economic developer of the Medina County Board of Developmental Disabilities. "Employees with disabilities are an untapped resource of dedicated and productive workers. They have lower turnover rates, which translates into better productivity."

Nathan loves his job so much he says he wants to turn his part-time position into a full-time job. He also takes pride in the fact that he has never taken off work for a sick day.

## Setting the Record Straight

If any of these myths are holding you back from hiring someone with a disability, consider these facts:

**Myth: Employees with disabilities take more time off for doctor appointments and call in sick often.**

**Fact:** Ask any employer and they will tell you employees with disabilities are loyal and don't miss any more time than other staff, because they are happy to be employed and look forward to work each day.

**Myth: People with disabilities need constant supervision.**

**Fact:** After learning the needed job skills, with the help of the Medina County Board of Developmental Disabilities, these employees perform their jobs without any extra help. They have the same job performance and productivity expectations as employees without disabilities.

**Myth: It is expensive for businesses to accommodate employees with disabilities.**

**Fact:** The majority of employees don't require any special accommodations. Of the ones who do, more than half cost less than \$500. And the federal government offers tax incentives to help employers pay for any modifications that make their business accessible to persons with disabilities.

"We have started to employ people with disabilities at our facility because we realize all of the benefits of having diversity in the workforce," says Kimberly Corrigan, administrator of Pearlview. "Nathan is our first employee with a disability who we have hired and he has proven to be such a valuable part of the staff that we are considering adding other employees with disabilities in the future."

*The Medina County Board of Developmental Disabilities' community employment office is located at 2736 Medina Road, Suite 107, in Medina. Call 330-725-1373, email [edd@mcbdd.org](mailto:edd@mcbdd.org) or visit [MCBDD.org](http://MCBDD.org) for more information on how you can benefit from its job matching services.*



Susan Harper works with Nate, helping define his job responsibilities at Pearlview.