



Photography: Benjamin Margolis

As part of its services, the Medina County Board of Developmental Disabilities provides assessments, training and job placement to transition employees with disabilities into contributing members of the workforce. (Pictured above L-R: Rosabelle, Adina and Eric)

# Workers with rewards

*People with physical and developmental challenges can enhance the fabric of any workplace culture—and everyone benefits.*

by Laura Briedis

When Adina Kolar greets you as you walk through the doors at the Medina County Board of Developmental Disabilities administration office, her captivating smile and personable demeanor attract your attention. Her wheelchair goes virtually unnoticed.

A part-time receptionist, this 24-year-old is just one of more than a hundred employees with disabilities trained by the agency.

Another employee, Rosabelle Roth, who has experience working in a factory, school cafeteria and craft store, is training for a new job so she can support herself and her son.

While these two employees currently work at the agency's office, others are gainfully employed at local businesses spanning large corporations such as Westfield Insurance, mid-size companies like Buehler's Food Markets and Minnehaha Water Outlet and small business like American Classic Snacks.

"We want to be like everyone else," comments Adina. "We want to be productive and work so we can earn a paycheck and provide for ourselves."

This sentiment drives the Medina County Board of Developmental Disabilities in all that it does, not only to assist employees with disabilities find jobs, but also to make it rewarding for local businesses while positively impacting the community.

"Employees with disabilities are an untapped resource of loyal, dedicated and efficient workers," says Ed Dryer, associate director of adult services. "Nationally, these workers have 85 percent one-year employment retention rates. At our agency, employees stay in the same job for five years, on average. We have a source of dependable workers who want to work."

In addition to less staff turnover—saving businesses money in the long run—there are other compelling reasons to hire people with disabilities.

"Businesses report that people with disabilities increase other employees' morale and productivity," notes John Krebs, economic developer. "Plus they support businesses who support them, as employees with disabilities represent an eight trillion dollar market segment."

As part of its mission, the Medina County Board of Developmental Disabilities provides assessments, training and job placement services to

help employees with disabilities become contributing members of the workforce.

"We create a bridge between employees with disabilities and local business owners," states Patti Hetkey, community relations coordinator. The agency provides businesses with skilled employees to fill different job functions. They identify employers' needs, find a good match and use job coaches

to help employees learn any needed job skills—at no cost to the employer. These job coaches can even work alongside the employee for as long as is needed to make sure that person is a successful fit for the business.

"These employees are not limited to certain jobs," says Patti. "There is a misconception that they can only do certain cookie-cutter types of jobs, but that is not true. We serve 1,100 people with disabilities who, frankly, can do 1,100 different jobs."

"A person's job is a

big part of his or her identity," adds Patti. "When you first meet someone they usually ask, 'what do you do?' It is no different for people with disabilities. They want to work and have that identity."

When asked what would be their dream jobs, both Adina and Rosabele have similar replies, noting how happy they are to work anywhere. "I just want to be productive

and provide for myself and my family," says Rosabele.

"I want an equal opportunity to get different types of work and not just be limited to certain tasks," adds Adina.

*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.*

**We have a source of dependable workers who want to work."**