

MASWM

Dignified and meaningful employment for people with disabilities...Quality services for Missouri.

Workshops Enter 2023 with Significant Optimism

Missouri's nearly 90 workshops and their nearly 5,000 employees with disabilities begin a new year with significant amounts of optimism, something that might seem surprising.

Workshops definitely face challenges, from regulatory questions to economic shifts. And there are other issues, like rising costs, complex regulations and more – all while serving people with disabilities who need unique and caring programs to ensure their employment choices.

One reason these and other issues aren't causing panic is that workshops have "been there, done that" for over half a century.

Deep Roots

Missouri workshops were in most cases founded by parents and other supporters of those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Starting in the 1960s, these parents and other caregivers realized that their adult children were not going

to receive the services they needed unless they made the effort to create them. A few would find employment in the community. Some would be served by government agencies. But many, even most, would end up at home, isolated and discouraged.

And so, the parents built an alternative, from the ground up.

Individual Choice

The result is an extremely flexible and creative system. Missouri's 89 workshops are basically small, nonprofit businesses that reflect the dramatic differences of their environments. A few, mostly urban, workshops are large, serving 200 or more people with disabilities and working with local business and industry on an astounding range of contracts. But most are small, with a few dozen or so employees in Missouri's small towns and rural areas. Others fall somewhere in between.

But regardless of size, all workshops

must use highly creative, entrepreneurial strategies to generate business that pays
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The Skills Center operated by Boone Center Inc. in St. Peters was the focus of an in-depth feature by KMOV 4 in St. Louis. The program and others like it illustrate the commitment to diverse employment choice by Missouri's 89 workshops.

MASWM Joins Lt. Gov., Manufacturers and DESE in New Effort

MASWM joined Missouri Lt. Gov. Mike Kehoe, leaders of the Missouri De-

partment of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Missouri Association

of Manufacturers to sign a Memorandum of Collaboration (MOC) formalizing a partnership between the organizations on Nov. 29 in St. Louis.

"Sheltered workshops offer incredible opportunities for Missourians with disabilities and their families, and many Buy Missouri member companies already utilize services from one of the 89 sheltered workshops across the state," Kehoe said. "This collaboration will benefit Missouri's workforce development efforts, while promoting Missouri manufacturing, products and services."



Missouri Lt. Gov. Mike Kehoe joined leaders of the state's workshops, education and manufacturing to cement a collaborative agreement with the Buy Missouri program.

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MASWM Joins Lt. Gov., Manufacturers and DESE in New Effort

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The signing took place at Chocolate Chocolate Company, a Buy Missouri member currently utilizing sheltered workshop services. Lt. Gov. Kehoe was joined for the signing by Dan Gier, director of DESE's Extended Employment Sheltered Workshop Program; Michael Eaton, executive director of the Missouri Association of Manufacturers; and Rob Libera, president of the Missouri Association of Sheltered Workshop Managers.

"Collaboration with business and in-

dustry partners is essential to our work at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, including the sheltered workshops we oversee statewide," said Commissioner of Education Margie Vandeven. "Relationships like these are just one way to broaden our state's collective efforts to focus on workforce development and employment for all Missourians."

The mission of the agreement is to increase awareness of the capabilities of each organization, to promote Missouri manufacturing, products and services, and to provide employment and training opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities and the community at large.

"The Missouri Association of Sheltered Workshop Managers is proud to be part of this unique and unprecedented collaboration," Libera said. "Missouri is a leader in providing opportunity and employment choice for people with disabilities. These jobs provide stability, self-worth and dignity to thousands of Missourians. We applaud Lt. Governor Kehoe for this initiative and look forward

to working alongside the Buy Missouri program, the Missouri Association of Manufacturers and the Missouri Department of Education in continuing to promote the quality and reliability of Missouri products and services."

Through the agreement, the organizations will collaborate to develop and establish policies and procedures that will promote and sustain Missouri manufacturing and services, while providing employment and training opportunities for people with developmental disabilities.

"The Missouri Association of Manufacturers knows that collaboration is the best way to accomplish any objective," Eaton said. "This partnership creates a formal opportunity for these organizations to work together in creating opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities to work with even more Missouri manufacturers."

The Buy Missouri program is an initiative through the Office of Lieutenant Governor Mike Kehoe to promote products manufactured throughout Missouri.

MASWM

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Mission

Sheltered Workshops in Missouri share a common mission of providing dignified and meaningful employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

If you have questions regarding the Missouri Association of Sheltered Workshop Managers, please contact President Rob Libera – (636) 227-5666 or rllibera@lafayetteindustries.com; or Legislative Chair Kit Brewer – (314) 647-3300 or cbrewer@cuinc.org.

Workshops Enter 2023 with Optimism

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for most of their workshop costs. It's a nearly constant battle, but workshops have proven they can succeed.

New Challenge

Over recent months and years, those challenges have been compounded by everything from COVID to ill-considered criticism of workshops as an alternative. Some even argue that employment with private businesses is the only answer, even for people with highly individualized, moderate and severe disabilities.

Again, workshops have been there and done that. In fact, many of Missouri's workshops have been operating "community integrated employment" in partnership with private businesses for years, even decades. Workshops have seen firsthand the strengths and weaknesses of this option. In plain English, it's not for everyone. Some workers with disabilities simply struggle with the complex demands of working in a private company that can't

or won't repeat instructions or offer other help they need. Some feel isolated in a new workplace where they may not fit in.

Options for the Future

Workshops love it when an employee lands an "outside" job. In many cases, the worker has often expressed a desire to work in a restaurant or kennel, a landscaping company or another dream job. Many workshops have developed proven follow-along services to help employees pursue their dreams. They work constantly with their local businesses to maximize these opportunities. But they've also seen employees with disabilities leave or lose those jobs after a few months. That's why having a workshop "backup" is critical. They can and do try again.

For these and other reasons, workshops are not going away. Those who work closely with people who have disabilities know that and are grateful. This workforce deserves better, and workshops are there to ensure that happens.

Workshops in the News: Media Coverage Sees Shop Value

Missouri workshops were in the news recently with numerous television and newspaper reports sharing their positive experiences following shop visits.

Especially gratifying was how many of these newspapers and broadcast stations identified the critical role workshops play in the lives of their employees with disabilities. Regardless of the location within Missouri, these professionals saw firsthand what parents and others know: for many Missourians with disabilities, workshops are where they see their co-worker friends and realize safe but productive employment.

In October, DOCO Inc. in Ava was visited by Ozarks Fox AM hosts Kelly Smith and Jeremy Rabe. Based in Springfield, Ozarks Fox AM featured a series of reports on the Buy Missouri program with one of DOCO's contracts as an example.

Even more recently, Boone Center Inc. (BCI) in St. Peters was featured on KMOV 4 St. Louis. Focusing on the

workshop's Skills Center, the article and video showed how this workshop connects young adults with disabilities to full-time work.

Print media also finds a lot of news at Missouri workshops. One recent article in the Daily Journal focused on Madison County Workshop in Fredericktown. The author, staff writer Victoria Kemper, quickly saw that Missouri workshops are more than just places of employment. Noting a workshop thrift store that gives employees retail experience, she wrote, "The workshop is more than a place of employment; it is a team, a family and a great place to go thrift shopping."

Just after Thanksgiving, the Fulton Sun featured an article on Callaway County Extended Employment and its commercial laundry services. The publication detailed well the struggles laundry supervisor Brian Jones and his team faced as they navigated COVID while building a business.



A Springfield television station broadcast a feature on DOCO Inc., in Ava, one of many broadcasts or publications looking into good work in Missouri workshops.



Employee Honored for 50 Years of Service at St. Louis Workshop

Project CU in St. Louis celebrated 50 years of employment with the shop by Barbara Love. She was joined at the special event by her family and was presented with a resolution of recognition by Representative Taylor MacMann (D-80) from the Missouri House of Representatives and a certificate from Project CU.



Workshop Event Draws Area Leaders

Lafayette Industries in Berkeley and Manchester this fall hosted a “Grab’n Go” breakfast to thank their customers and supporters for being champions for disability employment.



Marissa Mackay Tops “VSI Best Seller List!”



Marissa Mackay recently launched her second book, The “Purple Dragon,” a fantasy book now on sale through Amazon.

Marissa Mackay may not be on the New York Times’ Best Sellers list yet, but she tops the list at Vocational Services, Inc.

VSI employs nearly 200 Clay and Platte County residents with disabilities at three locations in Liberty and North Kansas City. These employees provide services to area companies and even national corporations. They also boast significant individual accomplishments at work and at home. Mackay’s story may be one of the most dramatic.

She has worked at VSI since 2007 and has now published two books. “The Purple Dragon” and “Stay Magical” are both large print, hard cover and available for Kindle. A third is in the works.

Her fantasy subjects fit with much of today’s popular fiction that includes wizards, dragons and magic. In “Stay Magical,” for instance, the characters have graduated from high school and are deal-

ing with family members who practice their own magic.

“I like to write about dragons,” she said. “But I like to write about other stuff, too.”

Mackay’s interest in writing began in elementary school, but she became serious in high school. She wanted to write books about a superhero and created one who could turn into a dragon.

“It’s kind of a romantic story,” she added. “The superhero can turn into a dragon, and she falls in love with a bad guy, and the bad guy falls in love with her and turns good.” There are also bad guys looking for three stones to try to weaken that dragon.

VSI Executive Director Kimbal Mothershead said copies of the book have been ordered from Amazon. Autographed copies will be on display at the Liberty VSI Annex.

MoDOT, Workshops Partner To Increase Opportunities

Travelers using Missouri highway rest stops may not know it, but they’re benefiting from one of the best partnerships around to provide opportunities for people with disabilities.

Some 100 Missouri workshop employees maintain rest areas in a win-win arrangement with leaders of the Missouri Department of Transportation. Although it’s an easy partnership to miss, it’s significant for what it accomplishes.

“I don’t believe there is another state entity that does as much to provide employment for folks with disabilities in a community, nonsegregated setting than MoDOT does through the rest area contracts,” explained Susan Trump, former

manager of Unified Services in Bethany and still active on MASWM’s transportation committee.

Despite the complex world of government contracts and everything from COVID’s impact to holiday schedules, the groups have worked since 1987 to keep the relationship on firm ground. In recent years, they even worked to ensure the services continued and employees with disabilities were employed despite issues with contractors who had been hired by MoDOT to manage the operations.

Since this partnership was launched, there have been over 1,000 people with disabilities employed at rest areas. They

have not only kept the areas well maintained but often interact with visitors, serving as virtual ambassadors to residents and visitors alike.

“The whole state of Missouri should be proud of this,” committee Chair Linda Kimrey of Laclede Industries in Lebanon said. “This is a really great effort.”

MoDOT is governed by the Highway Commission appointed by the governor. Members currently include Chair Robert G. Brinkmann, Defiance; Gregg C. Smith, Clinton; Terry L. Ecker, Elmo; W. Dustin Boatwright, P.E., Kelso; Brian Treece, Columbia; and Warren K. Erdman, Kansas City.

Missouri Model Has State, National Significance

The Missouri Model for sheltered workshops is an important distinction for how these nonprofit, small businesses operate in this state and for discussions throughout the country.

MASWM President and director of Lafayette Industries in Manchester Rob Libera said even Missourians often underestimate how unique the idea is. "The Missouri Model for sheltered workshops is a model for the country," Libera said. "It gives extended employment options to people with moderate or even severe intellectual and developmental disabilities or combinations of disabilities. It provides more choice, especially for anyone who chooses to work in a workshop after trying competitive employment and was unable to hold those positions."

Other factors are important, especially when community employment is sometimes suggested as the only solution. "Missouri Model workshops provide stability in a safe environment," he added. "They offer workers a sense of purpose and socialization and provide an economic return for both the community and the state of Missouri."

50 Years of Success

This is not a new development. For over half a century, Missouri workshops have served tens of thousands of workers with disabilities who find safe, stable jobs that positively impact their lives and the families involved.

The Missouri Model also provides its services without federal funding. Instead, these workshops operate as small, nonprofit businesses with the largest portion of their income from business contracts and a range of other products and services.

These products and services are comprised of a huge variety, reflecting local markets, employee aptitude and, very often, the entrepreneurial inventiveness of the workshop staff. One shop may add furniture refinishing to its packaging, while another opens a thrift store. These and other programs offer unique experience and training for employees with disabilities and have a positive impact on their local communities.

Another significant trend involves workshop employees who work at private businesses in cooperation with the workshop. With "follow-along" support from the shop, these employees have the opportunity to try more complex jobs in a competitive environment while retaining some workshop support and the opportunity to return to the workshop if things don't work out, which occurs often.

Seeing is Believing

Not everyone appreciates the Missouri Model, but many critics seem to have never visited a workshop. It's no accident that most workshops were founded many years ago by parents of adult children with disabilities. These parents and guardians remain some of the strongest



Canterbury Enterprises in Shrewsbury recently shared the holiday by stuffing stockings in more than six different varieties. Employees teamed up to stuff, assemble and add toppers to thousands of stockings before the holiday deadline. Earlier in the month, they co-hosted a blood drive for Impact Life and collected donations for the nearby St. Patrick Center to help those in need during the holiday season.

supporters of workshops today.

"A lot of the critics need to see workshops firsthand to understand," Libera said. "They haven't seen a workshop; they haven't talked to the parents. Listening to the experiences of parents who have struggled to place an adult child in competitive employment is eye-opening."

Another factor is stereotyping people with disabilities and failing to see the huge range of differences in types of disabilities.

"To lump everyone with disabilities into one category and say there's one solution is really insulting to those individuals," Libera concluded. "It doesn't make sense."

50th Celebration for Workshop, Employees

Missouri Rep. Allen Andrews (R-1, far right) presented recognition plaques to Raymond Mitchell (left) and Dale Gillespie during a ceremony at Opportunity Workshop, Inc., in Stanberry. The shop celebrated its 50th anniversary and recognized Mitchell and Gillespie for working all of those 50 years.



Original Products, Services Help Expand Opportunities

Missouri's nearly 90 workshops perform a wide range of jobs to create employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Packaging and assembly, mail preparation and other services for local and even national businesses are the most widespread example. This business-to-business model works well in many cases.

But some communities have little if any local businesses for such services, while other workshops want to expand their business footprint and employment opportunities. One tactic involves original products and services that workshops provide and sell directly to the public.

These entrepreneurial ventures take many forms. Vocational Services, Inc., in the Kansas City Northland manufacturers first aid kits for pets.

One of the most unusual services is at Southeast Enterprises in South Kansas City. This workshop provides janitorial and other services for businesses in the growing medical marijuana industry, which is now expanding with Missouri's recently passed recreational amendment.



Workers at Unique Services, Inc., in Mountain Grove are among Missouri's workshop employees who produce original products and services as a way to expand opportunities for people with disabilities.

Staff at Southeast see a significant opportunity for employees with disabilities who enjoy working outside of a workshop environment.

In the Ozarks, Unique Services, Inc. in Mountain Grove provides one of the most unique programs, high quality furniture refinishing. Like most workshops, the specialty is an additional opportunity

for employees, along with more traditional areas like lawn care, packaging and fire starters for grills, fireplaces and campfires.

These are just a few examples of how workshops use entrepreneurial creativity to generate employment opportunities that also help their local communities.

State Officials Tour Columbia Workshop

Central Missouri Subcontracting Enterprises (CMSE) in Columbia hosted two Missouri leaders for a tour at the workshop and its adjoining greenhouse and sales outlet, Giving Gardens.

Workshop Manager Bruce Young (left) welcomed Tim Gains, retiring assistant commissioner for the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Adult Learning and Rehabilitation Services. Also on the tour was Gains' successor, Chris Clause. Chris is the former coordinator of Performance Management at Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation where he often worked closely with MASWM and Missouri's workshops.

Also present were (background) MASWM President Rob Libera (left) and Legislative Chair Kit Brewer.



MASWM Website Offers Information

The MASWM website at moworkshops.org offers extensive information on workshops, their services and more. Among the highlights is background on

the people we serve, various programs and related information. There's also a database of workshop services and a list of MASWM events.

Macon Center Expands Recycling and Other Services

After 35 years, Macon Diversified Industries is celebrating operation as a recycling collection center and much more.

MDI opened its doors in October 1987 as a nonprofit organization, starting with only six employees who collected, sorted, and bailed recyclable corrugated cardboard. The only recyclable collection center within a 30-mile radius, MDI grew to accommodate paper, plastic, aluminum, and metal. MDI recently obtained certification for on-site mobile shredding for businesses requiring secure destruction of sensitive documents.



MDI in Macon celebrated its first company picnic in appreciation for all the hard work their employees do every day.

Macon resident William Darnell was named MDI's new executive director with a management staff of eight employees in March of 2021. Although the workshop is small in comparison to some, it employs an average of 20 to 25

employees with varying disabilities, giving them opportunity for employment. Income from the recycling and donations are essential in the process of providing jobs for those with disabilities while providing a valuable recycling source for the surrounding communities.

MDI also operates the Timeless Treasures Thrift Store.

Among those who are also a part of this story include retiring board member Ben Williams, who was recently recognized for 18 years of dedicated service.

Perryville Shop Earns Award for Recycling Efforts

Staff leaders at United Enterprises in Perryville were presented with the Missouri Recycling Association (MORA) Award for the most Outstanding Non-Profit Recycling Program.

Executive Director Janet Squibb and document destruction manager Tracy Sitze represented United Enterprises at the ceremony. The workshop was one of

only eight organizations out of 70 applications selected by the Missouri Recycling Committee Oct. 12.

In the past three years, United Enterprises has worked diligently to grow their Document Destruction Program, Squibb said. "This growth has allowed United Enterprises to purchase a box truck to help with the increased demand in cus-

tomers," she noted. "Tracy and her recycling team are committed to providing the best customer service possible. This commitment proves how United Enterprises' diligence has paid off."



Missouri Sen. Karla Eslinger addressed a large crowd gathered at Opportunity Sheltered Industries in Houston during an open house recognizing the company's 35th anniversary. OSI director Sharon Tyger introduced employees and thanked clients during the event. Many visitors from the community joined the ceremony and had a chance to see what takes place at the workshop every day. (Photo Credit: Doug Davison, Houston Herald.)



Janet Squibb (left) and Tracy Sitze accepted one of only eight Outstanding Non-Profit Recycling Program awards presented Oct. 12 by the Missouri Recycling Association (MORA). Squibb is executive director of the workshop, and Sitze is the document destruction manager.

Missouri Workshops Join National Employment Celebration

Almost 90 workshops in Missouri and the nearly 5,000 people with disabilities they employ celebrated October 2022 as National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM).

These shops, officially labeled “extended employment sheltered workshops,” are nonprofit, small businesses. Most provide Missouri and even national businesses with a wide range of services, from packaging products for retail display to custom processing of delicate instruments. Many also manufacture original products and services, from first aid kits for pets to furniture refinishing.

Other shops operate thrift stores, greenhouses and other community businesses and play important roles in their community. Workshop teams clean and maintain Missouri highway rest areas and work with local businesses to fill gaps that otherwise would require the businesses to hire expensive full-time additions or make other changes. Many entrepreneurs and small business owners utilize workshops for growing their operations, using the workshop staff to “expand” their companies when adding their own space and staff would be impossible.

What all this does for workshop employees is equally remarkable. Most of the people Missouri workshops employ have one or more developmental disabilities, ranging from moderate to severe. Almost universally, they love their work and the people they work with. For many, going to work is the highlight of their



Lake Area Industries in Camdenton held an open house to celebrate National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Everyone wore their green A Team Missouri shirts, enjoyed chili dogs and green dessert. Employees also led groups of area residents on tours of the workshop, showcasing the shop and its employment opportunities for those with disabilities.

day.

“The social skills, the training and the work they take pride in – those are really significant,” explained MASWM President Rob Libera, who serves as executive director of Lafayette Industries near St. Louis. “But a lot of times, what they also love is the people they know and feel comfortable with.”

Held every October, NDEAM is a good time to educate about disability employment issues and celebrate the many and varied contributions of Amer-

ica’s workers with disabilities. The 2022 theme was “Disability: Part of the Equity Equation,” with an emphasis on issues like the nation’s completing the recovery from the COVID pandemic.

NDEAM is led by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), but its spirit lies in the many observances held at the grassroots level across the nation every year, including at workshops throughout Missouri.



Those at Heartland Industries during a recent employee appreciation day included (from left) Executive Director Mike Macauley, Senator Doug Beck, former Executive Director Dee Froneyburger and Heartland Board President Kevin Hasting.

Heartland Industries Holds Employee Appreciation Day

Heartland Industries in St. Louis held a special Employee Appreciation Day as part of National Disability Employment Awareness Month on Wednesday, Oct. 19. Manager Mike Macauley invited legislators and media to attend and was honored with a visit by Doug Beck, Missouri State Senator from District 1 who joined for a tour. Beck and Macauley had a very good discussion, and the senator expressed his appreciation for workshops and promised his continuing support of the industry.

Also on hand was Fredbird, the official mascot for the St. Louis Cardinals major league baseball team, who was a huge hit with Heartland’s workers.

Beck’s tour of Heartland Industries in St. Louis was a significant part of a special Employee Appreciation Day. Those present included Executive Director Mike Macauley, Senator Beck, former Executive Director Dee Froneyburger and Heartland Board President Kevin Hasting.