



Lots of news for 2007.

A message from the President

First and foremost, welcome to the new Executive Director of HearthStone of Wisconsin, Tom Gierke. Tom is our first ever paid staff member. We first met Tom back in 2002, when he was the keynote speaker at the first RCS/HearthStone/DVR Employer Recognition Luncheon. Tom's inspiring presentation chronicled some of the many challenges he faced in trying to find meaningful – and reliable – employment. Since then, Tom has held several positions, although as luck would have it, each was relatively temporary in nature. In December, when grant funding for Tom's past position ran out, he did some networking and it dawned on us that he was doing all the things we were having trouble finding volunteers to do – newsletter, member mailings, maintain our data base, shift from paper mailing to electronic, handling finances – we needed help, and Tom needed part time employment. A match made in Heaven, you say? Well, maybe we'll leave that for Tom's new friend, but let's just say things worked out well. I'd also like to share with you that Tom has been named self-advocate of the year for 2006 by the WCDD (Wisconsin Council on Developmental Disabilities) and will receive his award at a recognition luncheon in Madison on May 24th.

In other areas, the big news is Family Care and how it will be implemented in Sheboygan County. Thanks to Sue Ann Schuh, we've already had two very informative Educational Meetings on the issue, with more to come. Our "Waiting Lists" still loom over us, however, the promise of Family Care says no more waiting. Can't come soon enough. Good news is that DVR is fully funded and has virtually eliminated the waiting lists for thousands of people statewide. Our friend Bonnie Hughes has left DVR, and we thank her for all those early mornings driving to our meetings from Green Bay. We wish her the best.

In closing, I wanted to recognize the tremendous efforts of Peggy Feider, the HearthStone Person of the Year for 2006. Her service to HearthStone and to the Sheboygan County HHS Board is outstanding.

Please enjoy the rest of the news from HearthStone – and please give us your E-mail address and sign up to receive the next newsletter electronically. We'll save \$\$ and a tree or two.

Thanks for you interest and commitment to people with disabilities.

Regards,
Jon Rost - President

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT
By Tom Gierke

It is with great pleasure that I have been given this opportunity to officially announce my recent hiring as Hearthstone of Wisconsin's first official Executive Director.

For those of you that have not met me in person, my name is Thomas Gierke. I have been serving as Executive Director since February. For a little personal history, I have lived in the area my entire life and have a very diverse background. My professional education is in Mechanical Engineering, but although I enjoyed the challenge, it never filled my need to help others, especially individuals with disabilities. After my engineering career abruptly ended, I began a new chapter in my life. I started working for local volunteer-based organizations, performing the day-to-day operations such as administration, membership, meeting planning, creating publications, finances, websites, public relations, and fund raising, I immediately discovered that I was better suited as a people-person than I was staring at cubicle walls daily. Last summer, a life-changing event led me to personally realize the importance of organizations such as Hearthstone. My physical disability, I was diagnosed with distal muscular dystrophy and require a wheelchair, coupled with life's events, thrust me into the situation in which I now needed the services that most disabled people require on a daily basis. I now have first hand knowledge of CIP, COP,

Employment Services, Home Care and Respite, Family Care, advocacy and yes, those dreaded waiting lists. I have certainly developed a level of knowledge and understanding about the services that individuals with disabilities require and this gives me a very unique advantage into performing my new position. During my months of advocating for services for myself, I learned that Hearthstone is already well known at a State level. My challenge will be to not only continue the relationship with our legislatures and officials, it will be to make the name "Hearthstone", even more recognizable. I plan on utilizing the media and other methods to get the word out. I will be setting up an interactive internet portal (listserve) that will allow a list subscriber to send approved messages or announcements to a large number of people with a quick click of a mouse. I also plan on improving the Hearthstone website with more pictures, announcements and a system of accepting donations electronically. The Hearthstone newsletter, which is already a great resource, will also move into the electronic age. Please forward your contact information, including email address to:
Thomas.gierke@hearthstonewi.org if you would like to receive this publication. Planning for increased fundraising, advocacy, awareness and events will be under way soon. I also look forward to hearing your suggestions and feedback. Once again, I thank you for this opportunity and I look forward to getting to know you better.

FAMILY CARE MEETINGS

By Sue Ann Schuh
Education Chairman

On December 14, Dennis Harkins, a nationally recognized expert in the Self-Determination Movement, came to South High's Library to share how self determination needs to be part of any successful plan. Family care does fit well with self-determination. There was a good group of parents, providers, consumers, and county employees. Some questions were answered; lots of ideas were discussed with some possibilities coming to light.

We did tape Dennis's presentation though it is our first attempt. While rather amateur in quality, it does have lots of good information if you were unable to join us.

Thank you, RCS Transition Program for joining with Hearthstone in bringing Dennis to Sheboygan.

On March 29th Ann Wondergem, Director of Sheboygan County Health and Human Services, Paul Soczynski and Barbara Moore, from Community Care, gave a presentation on where Sheboygan County is in the planning of long-term care reform and the role of Partnership Organizations. Sheboygan County is a participating member in a region of 12 counties. Our region is in discussion with 3 partnership organizations, Community Care being one, and Lutheran Social Services as possible partnership organizations to work with.

The presentation and discussion included how Partnership Organizations with their service model, have realized cost savings with the elderly population. Grouping services and increased health monitoring produce the two most effective cost savings. Though everyone would still have a case manager consumers would also have a nurse practitioner that can coordinate and monitor health issues. The transition from county managed to partnership managed long-term care has been mostly smooth and efficient in other counties that Community Care has set up care.

We were very pleased to see a good turn out for this presentation. Long Term Care reform will affect us for the next 20+ years and as advocates we have to be asking questions. There were lots of questions at the presentation but there may have been a few left unanswered and some you may have thought of afterwards. We are planning on another presentation on Family Care be sure to come and learn with us and ask questions.

NEXT MEETING

Thursday, May 31 – 6:00-7:30 PM
Health & Human Services 2nd Floor
Jim Hogemeier & Lynn Breedlove
More info on Family Care!!