



IRIS Connections

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People in IRIS have many gifts and talents, and each person can find their own ways to get involved with their communities. Here are three stories of people who contribute by focusing on the things they love to do and, as a result, make their part of the world a better place to live.

The word "community" is often used to refer to the places we live – whether it's a bustling city, small town, or anywhere in between. "Community" is also the feeling of fellowship when we are connected to the people around us. People feel valued and have a stronger sense of self-worth when they contribute to their community. When people have opportunities to share their gifts and talents, they help build meaningful relationships and create a sense of community for everyone involved.

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Community Matters



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Getting Beyond Interested: Stories of Meaningful Conn



Carla Peterson

If you're visiting the town of Cable in northern Wisconsin, the odds are that you'll meet Carla Peterson. Carla is a well-known "local" due to the wide variety of ways she connects with people and contributes to the well-being of her community, which includes her skills as a farmer, artist, clown and reading enthusiast.

A tour of the town with Carla starts with the Cable Community Farm (cablecommunityfarm.org). Located only a mile from town, the farm sits on 35 acres of woods and pasture. Its mission is simple - to grow food and build community. The farm offers garden plots to local families, workshops for community members, a flower garden to support fundraising for a local children's theater, and free food for the food pantry in town. Carla has worked with many other Cable residents on the farm since it began – lending her muscles to tend the grounds or to clear snow, helping establish beehives, participating in the Harvest dinners and much more. She's

very excited about the new chicken coop that is planned for this summer.

In the fall of 2013, Carla worked with community members to set up a Little Free Library at the farm. The Cable Community Farm Little Free Library is a beautiful little box where people can leave a book to share with others or take a book for themselves. As the Steward (an elected representative) for the library, Carla is committed to the power of reading. On the Little Free Library's Facebook page, Carla says, "The best thing about the Cable Community Farm Little Free Library is that the love of reading will spread throughout our community! My Little Free Library, I hope, will be GREAT reading for young kids and adults, to help everybody read more freely without book fines!" This summer, Carla plans to plant flowers around the library and to keep it well stocked, especially with books for children who are at the farm with their families.

Working with the community farm and library would be enough to keep most people busy, but not Carla. Carla is also active as a clown, complete with a colorful costume. Her joyous presence is part of almost every parade in Cable, as well as other local events, entertaining both children and adults with her antics. She likes nothing better than to bring smiles to everyone around her.

Any tour of Cable with Carla is best ended with a visit to one of the local restaurants. You must visit the Rivers Eatery, owned by her friends Mick, Beth, Carley and Libbey, where Carla's artwork beautifies the walls. The Dinky Diner is also a great spot, where everyone knows Carla's name. It's clear that she is a "regular" and a friendly face that everyone is excited to see.



Jacob "Jake" Schindler

Downtown Menomonie recently received a creative makeover; local artists decorated the dull-looking traffic signal boxes around town. Jacob (Jake) Schindler is one of these artists. Coining his style, "Bare Hands Abstract Art," he uses his hands and a palette of many colors to bring his ideas to life on canvas and other surfaces. Jake's IRIS consultant saw the opportunity to participate in the Menomonie Art Project and helped him submit his proposal to paint some of the traffic boxes in town. Though there was stiff competition, Jake was one of the local artists selected and began painting and making friends with other artists soon after. Another friend Jake has made through this art project is Joanie Dulin, the Executive Director of Main Street Menomonie, Inc., who admires his paintings and publicly recognizes his value as a citizen of the Menomonie area. The utility boxes also caught the attention of the local library, which asked him to paint a handful of the Little Free Libraries around town.

Connections in Communities



Davonna Wilson

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When you meet Davonna Wilson, you immediately sense her warm and welcoming energy. She is very excited to talk about how far she has come, despite many years of chronic pain and health obstacles. “I went back to college, a few years ago, and that would not have been in my plans,” she explains. Davonna is kind and patient, but firm and commanding when she speaks. These qualities are a stable platform for beginning to fulfill her dreams of bringing change and education to her community in Milwaukee.

Like any college student, Davonna is meeting a lot of new people and finding opportunities to get involved on the Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) campus. She takes the responsibility of rounding up people on campus to participate in marches and other political events. Recently, a group of students and professors gathered downtown to advocate for living wages for those who work in the food industry. She is grateful for her relationships with her

professors and the chance to meet people who share her interests. Davonna states, “They have friends, connections, and networks that lead to my field. They’re showing me how to be a part of my community and how to access information.” She is very passionate about playing an active role in her community, explaining how, “It’s really fulfilling to be able to contribute when at one time, you couldn’t.”

“The talent I share is motivating people around me to think outside the box,” Davonna proudly states, as she tells a story about how she motivated a girl in her class to read and prepare for an upcoming test. “I sat down with her and told her, you need to read these chapters, and you’ve got seven days... she called me at midnight and said, ‘Guess what I’m doing? I’m on Chapter 13!’ We had eleven chapters to read, and she had four chapters to go.” Davonna admits, “She got a higher score than I did, and I said, ‘I told you [that] you could do it!’”

Though it has already been a long road for Davonna, this is just one mile marker on her way to changing her community for the better. Thinking about the future, Davonna hopes to “look outside of the box, have a broader view of where I can contribute, have reasonable income for my family and actually be involved in change.” She is setting her sights on building a more concentrated youth program that helps teach youngsters valuable skills so they are equipped for the real world. She also wants to start a respite facility for older adults. Davonna shares this inspirational message: “If you’ve ever dreamed about anything—just one baby step at a time—you can do it. I am a living, breathing example.”

This isn’t the first time this Colfax resident shared his art in his community. The Mayo Clinics in Menomonie, as well as a couple of other locations in town, proudly display his work on their walls. Jake’s art has even landed on a line of women’s handbags which are sold at two stores in Colfax. Jake also reaches beyond his local community, presenting his art and building relationships with other vendors at events such as the Self-Determination Conference hosted in Wisconsin Dells every year. He has gained nationwide attention on news stations in Wisconsin, Texas, New Mexico, New York and many others. Though Jake speaks few words, his art communicates the importance of sharing our gifts with others.

As if his community and nationwide recognition wasn’t enough to get his whole family excited, President Barack Obama has also sent Jake a letter of appreciation. The president writes, “I am continually inspired by young people

like you who rise above challenges to give back and make a difference, and your example reflects the very best of the country.” His mother Tina couldn’t be more proud of his accomplishments either, and continues to support his artistry through maintaining his website, www.jakesprints.webs.com, and coming up with new ways to share his art. The website now has an online store where prints and handbags are available for purchase 24 hours a day.

From an artist to a local business man, Jake is well on his way to making his mark in his hometown and beyond. Jake has successfully made his hobby into a way to communicate and participate in his community. His story shows that everyone can find something they’re passionate about and share it with others to create strong community connections.

Events

SEPTEMBER

10-12 Wisconsin Aging Network Conference
Kalahari Resort - Wisconsin Dells

OCTOBER

9-10 Wisconsin Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) Conference
The Plaza Hotel & Suites - Eau Claire

15 CESA #1 Transition Resource Fair
Tommy Thompson Youth Center - Milwaukee

17 WI Transition Academy: College and Career Day
Glacier Canyon Lodge at the Wilderness Resort
Wisconsin Dells

17 Grant County Elderfest
Youth and Aging Building, Grant County Fairgrounds
Lancaster

NOVEMBER

10-12 Self-Determination Conference
Kalahari Resort - Wisconsin Dells

Self-Determination Conference: Nov. 10-12

The Self-Determination Conference is uniquely designed to bring the experiences of self-advocates together in a practical “how to” guide provided with the assistance of professionals, family members and support staff. Learn from their experiences and imagine the possibilities!



The Self-Determination Conference’s theme this year is Mission Possible: Discovering the Potential in our Communities. Sessions will include a variety of ways to describe community, how to get involved and what we can contribute to our own communities. Learn more at www.wi-bpdd.org/sdc/ about how to RSVP, what scholarships might be available and who to call for hotel reservations.

Resources

The **Community Living Toolkit** provides tips, resources and practical worksheets for anyone wishing to learn more about accessing, participating and feeling a sense of belonging in your community. You can find the toolkit at www.tmg-wis.com/iris/docs/misc/cl_tool.pdf.

The **SD Network powered by InControl Wisconsin** is a place to share stories, resources, ideas, and anything else to get more connected, develop relationships, and build strong communities. This network is for people in IRIS, family members, educators, and others hoping to keep up with events and ways to build community. Visit their home page at sdnetworkwi.org.

TimeBanks are a way for people to support each other through locally organized networks. They are based on the concept that every person can provide something of value to others. Instead of using money, people in these networks exchange “TimeBank hours.” Any interested person is welcome to join their local TimeBank. To learn more about TimeBanks, including whether there is one near you and how to start one, check out www.timebanks.org.

