

45 Years of Service

Can you imagine going to work in the same place for 45 years? Welcome to the world of Sharon Koerselman who has been coming to work at the Village in the same building for 45 years! Sharon recently became the third Village Northwest Unlimited employee to reach the milestone of 45 Years of Service to the Village. She is the only one still working a full time schedule.

Koerselman began her career in 1979, as an employee of Northwest Iowa Work Activity Center (NWIWAC) at the location of VNU's current Summit building. Sharon continued to work at NWIWAC until 1986, when NWIWAC merged with Village Northwest Unlimited to become Northwest Enterprises (NWE). As an employee of NWE, Sharon continued to report to work at the same location she had for the previous seven years. Koerselman then spent the next 31 years supervising staff and residents at NWE in the same building where she started her career.

Then in 2017, NWE's name was changed to The Summit as part of the federal government's elimination of work activity for individuals like the residents served by VNU. At the time of this change, Sharon took on her current role of a Community Program Supervisor. Still coming to work in the same building as she did on her first day of work in 1979.

The Village is honored to have had Sharon on our team for 45 years and is grateful for the many things she has done in her career to advance and enhance the lives of the individuals served by Village Northwest Unlimited. Thank you, Sharon!!!



VILLAGE VOICE

VILLAGE NORTHWEST UNLIMITED // Spring 2024



Scrimmages with a Purpose

For the last two years, middle school students from Sheldon and Sanborn Christian Schools have participated in basketball scrimmages against the Village Northwest Unlimited Panthers. The Panthers, as they are affectionately known, are the Special Olympic Basketball team for the Village. The team consist of 10 individuals served by VNU. They participate in many inter-squad exhibitions at local colleges and high schools throughout the winter. They also compete in a regional tournament where the winner can advance to the Iowa State Special Olympics Tournament in March each year.

Nate Schreur, physical education instructor at both Sheldon and Sanborn Christian Schools, presented the idea for his middle school physical education students to scrimmage the Panthers to the team's coaches, Deb Middle and Sara Wolthuizen. He envisioned the scrimmages as a way to introduce his students to the Village, the individuals served and to break down any barriers that his students might have towards interacting with people with disabilities. "I think it is a great opportunity to have the students and the Special Olympic Athletes interact with each other and learn from one another. I hope the students learn that there is no reason to be awkward around people with disabilities. I hope they learn acceptance, kindness and encouragement."

Deb and Sara thought the idea of a scrimmage was a wonderful idea and thought it was great way for the Panthers to compete against new people rather than continually having inter-squad scrimmages. They hoped the students would learn no matter the age you are, everyone has the ability to compete. Additionally, the coaches knew that the extra scrimmages would be beneficial to the team as they prepared to qualify for the State Competition.

In late January and early February, the Panthers and the students from Sheldon and Sanborn Christian Schools have scrimmages against one another. The students and Panthers have come to enjoy this annual competition.

The annual scrimmages have become a tradition that both the students and the athletes hope to continue for many years. Thank you to Nate, Deb and Sara for organizing this wonderful event that connects the Village to the students of Sheldon and Sanborn Christian Schools.



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The Power of Connections

One of the greatest gifts many of the individuals served by Village Northwest Unlimited have is their ability to connect with those around them. This ability to connect is the result of the unfiltered joy and non-judgmental nature the individuals have. The individuals simply enjoy meeting others. Often people experience the feelings of being strengthened and encouraged after meeting a resident from the Village.

One of the best connectors at VNU is a young man named Jordan. Jordan is full of joy, spunk and he loves to meet new people. He is fearless in introducing himself to others. Certainly, Jordan has some limitations, but connecting with others is not an area where he struggles. He can be charming, quick-witted and very engaging. His bigger than life personality attracts people to him. Once Jordan has met someone, he considers them his friend.

Jordan is one of the many Village Day Program clients who participates in a weekly bowling curriculum at Locomotion Lanes and Diner in Sanborn, Iowa. Three times per week, Bert Van Dam, owner of the bowling alley, welcomes VNU staff and clients to his “railroad themed” facility for an afternoon of bowling. Jordan is part of a group who bowl on Tuesday afternoons. Tuesday also happens to be the day that Greg Swanson, a sales representative with Northern Lights Distributing of Fort Dodge, Iowa, is at the bowling alley to take Bert’s weekly food order.

Jordan’s desire to connect with new people led to his taking the opportunity to introduce himself to Bert’s “friend”, Greg. Because of Jordan’s connectivity to others, Greg and Jordan struck up a friendship. They enjoy talking sports and all things Kansas City Chiefs. As their connection has grown, Greg wanted to find a way to recognize or thank Jordan for the inspiration he has experienced because of Jordan’s zeal for life.

Greg asked Bert and Bert’s son, Josh, for assistance in finding a gift for Jordan that would reflect their common interest in bowling and the Chiefs. Bert and Josh looked through some of their bowling equipment catalogs to find a gift idea for Jordan. They found a perfect gift for Jordan – a Kansas City Chiefs bowling ball and bag. Bert ordered the ball and Josh fitted the finger holes on the ball to meet Jordan’s specifications. On a Tuesday afternoon, Greg and Bert surprised Jordan with his Chiefs bowling ball and carry bag. Needless to say, Jordan was beyond excited to receive this gift from his friends!



The story of Greg and Jordan is a wonderful example of how the residents of VNU impact the communities they are involved with. Who could have imagined a VNU resident bowling in Sanborn could make a lasting connection with someone from Fort Dodge and that this connection would grow into a friendship? Connection is a powerful act that nourishes and strengthens each participant. The residents served by VNU are awesome connectors. Their ability to connect without judgement is a blessing to many community members, both near and far.