

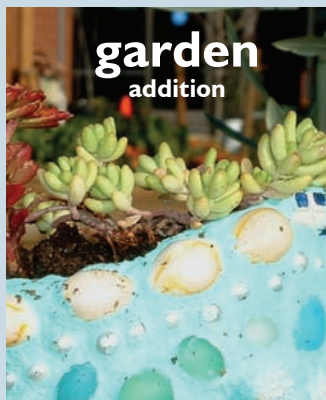
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25 years
of heart and soul



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MISSION IN MOTION

BI workers have a 'million-dollar' impact on global community

By Carin Lawrence

BI worker Bob Chalmers organizes new eyeglasses

When people ask how much workers at Becoming Independent can contribute to society, tell them millions of dollars in income to low-income families here and around the world and the chance for at least one little girl to go to school.

Both are true, and involve the work that participants at BI's Santa Rosa facility perform for a San Rafael non-profit called RestoringVision.Org.

The agency was founded in 2003 by Marin County resident Mark Sachs, who noticed during a trip to developing countries a need for reading glasses. He inquired of philanthropic and missionary groups and they confirmed a shortage and need for eyeglasses.

Sachs established Partners in Restoring Vision and Improving Lives, a non-profit now named RestoringVision.Org. In just six years the agency has provided more than 900,000 sets of reading and sunglasses to low-income families throughout the world and here in the U.S.

And workers at Becoming Independent have provided more than 500,000 of those glasses since it went to work for RestoringVision in 2006. [MISSION IN MOTION cont. pg 3](#)



A man in Mongolia tries out his new readers

SOME CHANGES AT BI

As you can see, the Becoming Independent newsletter has a new look. We like it. Let us know what you think. Also, beginning with this issue, all BI newsletter's can be sent to you electronically in a pdf file. Send your email address to Erin Thompson, ethompson@becomingindependent.org, and we'll put you on our regular BI newsletter email distribution list.



We're making some changes to our BI web site, too. Watch for that later this year.



BI in the moment

By Cami Weaver, CEO

The first three quarters of 2009 have been challenging at Becoming Independent. We haven't come through unscathed. But we've come through. We've learned, we've adjusted, and we continue to meet our mission for people with disabilities.

Most non-profits in California faced significant financial challenges given the recession and decline in state funding. Here at Becoming Independent our anticipated loss was what we expected. Budget cuts in Sacramento reduced our revenues by \$1.2 million. That's a lot of money, but we've managed to accommodate the shortfall without any impact on services to the 1,200 men and women who we work for.

Here's how we did it.

First and foremost, Becoming Independent was fully engaged in the budget process in Sacramento. This kept us informed and able to plan. No surprises. When the ax fell, we knew what to do. Our management team has been exceptionally supportive, accepting pay cuts for which I'm extremely grateful.

We reduced the amount of paper we generate by living more efficiently in the computer age. We cut down on lighting and heating. We abandoned the grass surrounding our facility on Corporate Center Parkway. No more expensive city water for irrigation. We are replacing the grass with drought tolerant plants and bark. There's a silver lining to this austerity measure. It created job opportunities for Becoming Independent participants and established a warm spirit of purpose and partnership with our friends from Golden Gate Landscape.

These and other cuts in administration and operations are providing the economies the new budget requires and, so far, no program for our BI participants has suffered.

Our people have suffered, however, either as the result of funding cuts or the threat of funding cuts. More than \$50 million in early intervention funds for at-risk children have been cut. Dental care under MediCal is on the chopping block, and it remains intact only because of a recent lawsuit that is pending. Rules for in-home care have changed, and about 150 of our BI participants who live independently face the very real prospect of getting less help. A different lawsuit challenging the proposed changes has delayed implementation of those new rules for the time being.

However, I can't underestimate the amount of stress all this has caused our people. As a result, advocacy has never been more important here at BI. Further, in these times of fiscal uncertainty, we're putting more energy into resource development.

We must be less dependent on state funding and are turning to old friends and making new ones for financial support. We are expanding efforts to bring more volunteers into the Becoming Independent operation and family of services.

And we are reaching out to the community for moral and political support. Our staff joined several hundred BI participants and others with developmental disabilities in a rally at the State Building in Santa Rosa this summer where the men and women we serve voiced their concerns to representatives of our state legislators. We suspect this will not be the last time our BI participants make themselves heard.

We'll keep you posted on these and other events as we work through these uncertain economic times.

BI was named one of the North Bay's "Best Places to Work"

And here's some good news.

In September, BI was named one of the North Bay's "Best Places to Work" by the North Bay Business Journal. One of our strategic goals made just last year was to see that BI was one of the chosen spots among North Bay workers.

Our Gallery of Sea and Heaven may well be headed back to the A Street Gallery that became BI's ArtWorks showcase in 2008. You'll recall that the City of Santa Rosa ordered the gallery closed earlier this year because of perceived safety issues. Since then, the city has determined structural challenges are not as severe as believed, and the city and owners, Lee and Carolanne Montgomery, are working to make repairs. And during this process, the owners have learned about Becoming Independent, embraced our programs, and now say they are committed to leasing the building for BI ArtWorks.

Our weekly email communiqué to families who use our Family Resource and Advocacy Center is growing rapidly. Every Monday, our message goes out to 270 families, alerting them to the latest information on how to best meet the challenges faced by their family members.

And finally, we are now on Facebook. Visit us at:

www.facebook.com/BecomingIndependent for frequent updates on all the happenings at Becoming Independent. Check it out.





Carin Lawrence
Chief of Services

MISSION IN MOTION cont.

Here's how it works.

Medical and faith-based groups, service clubs and other philanthropic groups notify RestoringVision.Org when they are planning a mission to a developing nation and how many glasses they may need.

Mark Sachs solicits American eyeglass makers for donations of surplus eyeglasses, such as seconds or products out of fashion. The firms send donations to Fort Docs, a document management firm a few blocks away from our Santa Rosa facility, which donates warehouse space.

Sachs sends an order to Becoming Independent's Employment Program, stating how many glasses are needed and where to send them, and we pick up the glasses at Fort Docs.

Our workers – as many as 25 BI workers have been involved in the program – sort and organize the eyeglasses by size and magnification, pack them in boxes of 300 and send them via UPS to the group planning the mission.



Leota Seekings boxes eyeglasses for shipping



In Honduras, a woman sees the difference



Adopt a BI Vehicle

Advertise your company and help BI turn disabilities into possibilities. Becoming Independent's "Vehicle Adoption Program" continues to be a very good advertising opportunity for businesses and organizations. The signs are designed by Boylan Point Agency and for 18 months advertise a product or business while traveling daily throughout the North Bay on BI vans and buses. Under the program an advertiser's message is displayed on both sides of the vehicle and the rear window. Cost: \$4,000. For more information, contact Erin Thompson at 707-524-6635 or ethompson@becomingindependent.org

THE ARRANGEMENT BENEFITS EVERYONE INVOLVED.

Eyeglass makers enjoy a write off for the donation.

Fort Docs realizes some of its philanthropic mission.

Workers at BI earn a paycheck and immense pride in helping people.

And missions abroad make huge differences in peoples' lives.

Mark Sachs says it costs about 50-cents for each pair of glasses. He calculates that a pair of glasses can add \$100 in annual income to residents of developing countries, a formula that over the years has amounted to millions of dollars.

And there's that school girl. He said one eyeglass recipient was a grandmother in rural Honduras. She made her living sewing, but her eyes were failing and she was not able to thread a needle. So she kept a granddaughter home from school to help her.

"When she got her eyeglasses, she could do the work by herself," Mark told us. "And her granddaughter went back to school."



Mark says BI's contribution is vital to the project. "Becoming Independent has been a life saver. Without BI I don't know how we would have been able to sort and package all these glasses."

And RestoringVision.Org is vital to BI and our participants. It's a way for people with disabilities to give back and demonstrate their contributions and value to the community and world.

Something Special for Richard and Linda on Their 25th

Heart and Soul

Since they married in 1984, Richard and Linda Robertson have always taken special care to celebrate holidays and birthdays.

This past spring they did something a little extra special.

“It was our 25th wedding anniversary and I wanted to make this a surprise for Linda,” said Richard. With the help of Becoming Independent’s Community Living Support Program (CLS) for people with disabilities, Richard organized a luxurious getaway at the Doubletree Hotel in Rohnert Park. “I chose a real nice room for us,” he said. “It had nice big beds, a TV in a cabinet, and a little patio outside. And the hotel had a hot tub and a swimming pool.”

Members of the couple’s BI support team, including CLS Service Team Supervisor Mary Blackburn and CLS Facilitator Vallie Sarver, made arrangements to drive Richard and Linda to the Doubletree on Sunday, May 31.

“When he surprised me with the hotel, he made me close my eyes,” said Linda. “When I saw it, I wasn’t sure I was in the right place.” “I loved everything,” she said. “Vallie brought us some balloons and a card when she met us in the hotel lobby. I really enjoyed the hot tub. It was nice and warm and easy to sit in.”

Richard took advantage of the overnight stay to do something he rarely does. “I loved the swimming pool. I hadn’t been swimming for years and years. I liked doing laps and I felt so good when I got out,” he



said. During his search for the hotel, Richard made dinner arrangements at nearby Latitude Island Grill. “We had a glass of white wine in the hotel and then went over to the restaurant for a delicious dinner and another glass of wine,” he said.

Linda said “the dinner was really good, the people were so nice, and they took our picture. Then we had dessert and they even put a candle in it.”

**“I told Richard at dinner:
If this is a dream, please don’t
pinch me, because I never want
it to end.”**

The couple had breakfast the following morning, took another swim and then checked out to return to their jobs at North Bay Industries where they met more than 25 years ago.

“I loved our anniversary so much,” said Linda. “The hotel even sent us a postcard thanking us for our stay.” With their Silver Wedding Anniversary behind them, Richard and Linda have this advice to other couples on how to keep a relationship going.

Richard: “Stay cool. Don’t get upset or mad at each other so that your blood pressure goes up. Help each other when you need it. Buy flowers sometimes, go out to lunch, love each other.”

Linda: “Get to know each other before you get married. Take care of each other when you’re sick or have any problems. I love Richard a lot. He helps me do things I can’t do myself.”



This year we must raise \$1.2 million in order to maintain the same level of funding we had before the state budget cuts.

RESOURCE DEVELOPMENTS

Finding the opportunities in the challenges

Cami Weaver had recently become CEO when she took me on my first tour of Becoming Independent. We were exploring a possible consultancy in the area of fund development and as she walked me around the main campus introducing me to artists and assembly workers, gardeners and cooks, I found myself flooded with memories of a very different time and place.

As a child I lived on the grounds of the psychiatric institutions where my parents worked. The model in those times was community exclusion for people with disabilities and my parents, a psychiatrist and a music therapist, were committed to forging a new path. I witnessed a team of activist professionals push reform to the front burner and was inspired. In college I made friends, worked, and for a time lived with a group of adults whose lives had been deeply impacted by years of unnecessary institutionalization.

As we toured and Cami described the many ways in which BI has achieved its mission of full community inclusion for people with disabilities, I realized how much progress has transpired. The strides that have occurred through organizations such as Becoming Independent are nothing short of extraordinary.

When I realized that funding is key to an organization's ability to meet its mission and to change the world in some truly meaningful way, I determined to devote my professional life to helping nonprofits attract the resources they require and merit.

Philanthropy allows us to invest in organizations that reflect our social values and to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. The process of giving is personally enriching. This is what I enjoy about resource development and it's why I'm excited to be at Becoming Independent.

BI was built by people who like my parents saw a challenge and rose to the occasion. We've been living these past couple of years in extraordinary times. Our economy is in distress and things that we've taken for granted, such as full state funding for programs like BI, are no longer assured. As BI's founders recognized, challenges present opportunities.

This year we must raise \$1.2 million in order to maintain the same level of funding we had before the state budget cuts. Our goal is ambitious but we are optimistic. We have inspired leadership and many friends. Family members and other BI supporters are asking us what they can do to help BI stay strong during these unprecedented times and we have a simple answer: Partner with us. Make Becoming Independent a priority in your philanthropy. Help us reach our important goals. Continue to be a part of something extraordinary.

Lisa Folsom-Ernst
Resource Development Director



Lasseter Pool Party

BI CEO Cami Weaver joined guests at the pool party hosted by film animator John Lasseter and his wife, Nancy Lasseter, in Sonoma Valley. The pool party was one of the top auction items at last June's Dinner Under the Stars. With Cami were Vince Albano, CEO of Mary's Pizza Shack, and Kathy Benziger of Benziger Family Winery. BI's employment partnership with Mary's and the Benziger family are examples of top-quality businesses that utilize and benefit from BI employees.



**'this extension program
couldn't have been possible
without the support
of Robert Brent'**

VOLUNTEERS/SPECIAL EVENTS

**A little time
and some paint
means a lot**

Volunteerism is alive and well at Becoming Independent. BI Sonoma Valley is looking refreshed and revitalized thanks to eight outstanding volunteers armed with paint brushes. We were pleased to be selected for this year's "Hands Across the County" volunteer work day and were particularly pleased when we learned that our paint crew was comprised of Volunteer Center Executive Director Eunice Valentine, Community Services Director Jim Bray, as well as Board members Mike Arendt, Linda Challoner, Cynthia Kramer, Kim McEachron, Jerry Phoenix and Eric Taylor.

I want to give a special shout out to Rich Danner at "Get Rich Quick Handyman Services" who donated his time and materials as well as Friedman Brothers for providing 15 percent discount coupons to help with supplies for the workday. BI couldn't have done it without you!

BI Healdsburg's art program has benefited enormously over the past three years thanks to the wonderful contributions of volunteer Sylvia Seventy. This year alone, Sylvia has volunteered over 120 hours in the art program. According to April, BI Healdsburg, "Sylvia brings out the best in each person and is very patient. Everyone wants to join her Art group." A gift of time is a gift that lasts always. Thank you Sylvia!

We've got a lot more to do at BI and we welcome anyone wanting to help. If gardening, handyman work, teaching ballet, yoga, or assisting in art interests you, please contact Jacqui Salyer at 707-524-6606 or jsalyer@becomingindependent.org

Jacqui Salyer
Resource Development Manager

BI LANDS

Focus on Healdsburg

Center Street Program Is Expanding

Becoming Independent is launching a two-year project to expand its office on Center Street in Healdsburg. The project will provide more office and program space and room to accommodate 60 participants. Plans to expand the BI office into the second half of the Center Street office are now under review by the City of Healdsburg.

BI CEO Cami Weaver said the expansion program couldn't have been possible without the support of Robert Brent, who owns the property at 625 Center St. "Mr. Brent has been an incredibly positive force in this process, and we are very grateful," she said.

BI and property owner Robert Brent are working on a two-phase project.

Phase One will provide new office space, an exercise area and a new vocational area that will accommodate more workers and more contracts. The current art and lunch areas will be expanded and the center hallway will become a space to showcase BI artists' work. Phase One is scheduled to be completed by the end of this year. It will enable BI to bring on board eight new participants who have been waiting to join the Healdsburg program.

Phase Two, to be completed within two years, will allow BI to expand services to an additional 30 individuals in its day program. We also have plans to use the additional space for evening parent support groups and independent living classes.

To keep updated on the project, go to BI's website at www.becomingindependent.org.



BI CEO Cami Weaver jumped in the driver seat of the Occidental Volunteer Fire Department's part-time "fire truck" during a "mystery trip" stop. A wonderful fire house dinner was provided by Chef and Board Member Josef Keller. The October event, organized by Ken and Sharon Maiolini, was sold at auction at the Dinner Under the Stars event in June.



Imagery Estate Winery picks Ali Koehler's art for wine label



ArtWorks Calendar

Ongoing Exhibits:

SR GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB
Through November
333 Country Club Drive, SR

SONOMA BANK, 801 4TH ST., SR

SENIOR ART SHOW
Through Nov. 23
FINLEY CENTER
2060 West College, Santa Rosa

By Appointment:

BI GALLERY
1425 Corporate Center Parkway, SR

NORTH BAY REGIONAL CENTER
2351 Mendocino, SR

WINZLER & KELLY
495 Tesconi Circle, SR

Tentative:

HOLIDAY LIGHTS SHOW
Dec. 12
Check BI web site for location.

BI ArtWorks Artist **Ali Koehler** took center stage at Imagery Estate Winery in Sonoma Valley during the Imagery After Hours Wine Club monthly party in October. Ali's watercolor interpretation of the Greek Parthenon was selected for the label on the winery's latest vintage of Lagrein, a rare Italian varietal red wine. Ali signed copies of the art and actual bottles of the wine for guests.

The art work was selected to be a label through a blind juried competition led by **Bob Nugent** who joined Ali for the celebration. Bob is curator of the art program at Imagery Estate Winery and a recent addition to the BI Board of Directors.



Succulents fill a mosaic planter pod, created by BI artists, at Jason's Garden.

BI's garden grows, thanks to Dennis Hunter & Bill Reinking

BI's quarter-acre garden on the grounds of its Santa Rosa program center finally came to life this past summer, thanks to Board member Bill Reinking and his friend, Santa Rosa businessman Dennis Hunter.

Dennis financed the construction of the garden. The work was completed over the summer and created a fenced garden with raised planter beds, irrigation system, storage shed, gravel paths and starter plants.

For his part, Bill had an architect design a redwood arbor and entrance. A sign, created by members of Forestville Boy Scout Troop 150, was installed in time for a reception in September during which Dennis saw the garden is named for his late son, Jason. Jason's Garden is now producing ornamental plants and produce.



1425 Corporate Center Parkway
Santa Rosa, Ca 95407

NON-PROFIT
US POSTAGE
PAID
AD-VANTAGE
MARKETING



OUR MISSION

To promote community inclusion and participation for people with developmental disabilities.

OUR VISION

An improved quality of life – meaningful work, recreation and support of family, friends and the community.

Becoming Independent
1425 Corporate Center Parkway
Santa Rosa, Ca 95407
Phone (707) 524-6600
Fax (707) 527-1206
www.becomingindependent.org

IN MEMORY . . .

Donations were made in memory of these friends:
James Cooper, Ruth DeMars, John Henry Dierking,
James (Jimmy) Erbacher, Dr. Jules Lapidus, Greg Neils,
Reyes Ramírez, Robert Scott, Eva Slott, Jack Taber, and Ben Thornton.

A special thanks to the estates of June Waite and Phyllis Williams.

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