

July 2019



*Life Full of Advocacy*

My name is Robert Kuhr and I am 49 years old. I was born in Neenah but have always lived in Menasha so I would say that I am very familiar with my community! I've always wanted to own a home and I can proudly say that I bought a house about 12 years ago. When I was finishing High School, I was told that I wouldn't be able to work in the community, so I got a job at a sheltered workshop. It wasn't too long before I realized that I was capable of more and that I should be working in my community. Since then I have worked many kinds of jobs including at Burger King, a grocery store, Wal-Mart and for a while I was a janitor at a Christian private School. My longest job was at Wal-Mart where I worked for 16 years before I recently decided to change jobs.

After I left the sheltered workshop and was starting to be successful in the community, I realized that I wanted to help other people with disabilities get competitive jobs and just more

independence in their communities. Back in 1992, shortly after realizing I wanted to do more to help people, I was approached by staff at The ARC of Neenah/Menasha to see if I wanted to help create a People First Chapter for Neenah/Menasha. People First Wisconsin is a statewide self-advocacy organization for people with disabilities. Being one of the founding members I was a shoe in to be President, which I did for two years. During the beginning of my time at People First I was asked to go to California to give a presentation on the importance of ending the “R” word and we had one of the biggest sessions. We had just held a campaign to get the Knights of Columbus to remove the word from the pins they wore at fundraising events and on candy they handed out. It only took a month for them to change their policy and remove the language! We took advantage of a BPDD grant to help us with the campaign.

It was at a statewide People First meeting where I met John Shaw from the Board for People with Developmental Disabilities and he asked me to fill out an application to be a board member. I am happy to say that I was appointed by Governor Jim Doyle once and Governor Scott Walker twice. Although my time being on the Board is coming to an end, next summer I can look back at my time and see all the great advocacy work I have done through BPDD. Just a couple of months ago I was able to attend the Disability Policy Seminar in Washington DC with board staff and other members. We had visits with our congressional representatives everyday which was cool being able to educate our elected officials on issues important to people with disabilities.

Overall, I think what I want people to realize is that you can make a difference no matter what skills you have or what people have told you about yourself. I am working on being able to read but it isn't something that I can do by myself but I have never let that get in the way of living in my community and trying my hardest to make it a more inclusive place.