



Sarah Snyder, right, coordinator of the Emeritus program, takes a walk with Robert "Bobby" Hicks around the Alambre building in Mission Viejo, which houses Vocational Visions. Hicks has been a client at Vocational Visions since 1977.



CELEBRATING 40 YEARS

Vocational Visions provides disabled adults with support, job opportunities and life-skills training.

BY MONA SHADIA
STAFF WRITER

MISSION VIEJO • Something had been weighing heavily on Randall Constantino's mind.

He knew he needed a change in his work environment but worried deeply about the consequences of speaking up. He also didn't want to hurt anyone's feelings. Making the change meant turning his back on the person who had been assisting and supervising him for two years.

Constantino decided to set up a meeting with his employer and ask for a new supervisor, a request that was approved.

"I'm so proud and happy," Constantino, who is 27 and has cerebral palsy, said of his decision.

Constantino, who uses a wheelchair and has difficulty speaking, credits Vocational Visions for helping him take the risk.

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ED CRISOSTOMO, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Panel serves up OK for Boudin Bakery site

Planning agency also adopts a plan for an indoor swim school.

BY MONA SHADIA
STAFF WRITER

A Boudin SF is coming to town.

San Francisco-based Boudin Bakery is set to bring one of its casual restaurants to Avery Center, the shopping center on the northwest corner of Avery and Marguerite parkways.

Boudin officials said the 4,005-square-foot eatery is expected to open in early September. It would operate from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.

daily, according to documents provided to the Planning and Transportation Commission.

The commission on Monday approved a permit for beer and wine sales at the site. In July, the commission approved a renovation plan for the center.

The two-phased project, which includes exterior improvements to buildings and outdoor dining areas and landscaping, is expected to be completed in two phases and finished by 2017, according to Associate Planner Greg Stones.

The panel also approved a plan for Evolution Swim Academy to open at 23854 Via Fabricante.

The school, which will have a 30-foot-by-50-foot

indoor pool, will be operated by Felipe Delgado.

Delgado, a former Olympic swimmer who was born in Mission Viejo, also has schools in Aliso Viejo, Ladera Ranch, Laguna Hills and San Juan Capistrano. Those locations have outdoor pools.

The Mission Viejo site will have an instruction area, waiting and viewing area, classroom, merchandise display area and changing room/restrooms, according to staff report.

The academy is expected to operate from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily, and could open in June.

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Game developer thrives on Kickstarter support

A Mission Viejo man creates board games with crowdsource funding.

BY CHRISTOPHER YEE
STAFF WRITER

When Mission Viejo resident Timothy Fowers conceives of games, they don't fall into the popular worlds of high fantasy or science fiction that other games thrust players into.

Instead, he puts players in slightly more conventional roles.

In his new board games Wok Star and Paperback, players are called upon to cook in a Chinese restaurant and write the great



CHRISTOPHER YEE, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Larry Rice, left, Jeff Horvat, Alfred Lee and Timothy Fowers play Paperback, a new card game created by Fowers and funded by a Kickstarter campaign.

American novel, respectively.

The games met their individual goals on crowd-

funding website Kickstarter in mid-July and are set

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INSIDE

Trabuco Hills' new football coach brings championship experience

Trabuco Hills High found its next football coach after a little more than a month of searching, fielding about 60 applicants and interviewing 15 of them. Tony Henney, from Nordhoff High in Ojai, was hired Tuesday and is expected to meet his new team for the first time today. Henney went 58-17 in six seasons at Nordhoff, his alma mater. In 2012, he brought the school its first CIF championship, winning the CIF-SS Northwest Division title. Last season, he repeated that feat as the Rangers went 13-2 en route to another title. See Page 13



About the programs

Vocational Visions provides six programs for clients, depending on their needs and abilities. Each program has a manager and several assistants who work with clients on daily activities and help them reach short- and long-term goals. All programs integrate participants into the community and recreational activities.

• **Day training activity:** Provides basic living-skills training and focuses on independence, personal growth and development.

• **Work activity:** Provides training to work in the organization's workshop and to transition to outside employment. Includes help with applications, interview techniques and aligning jobs with interests and needs. Clients are paid a piece rate commensurate with their productivity.

• **Adult development:** Placement in jobs outside the organization, including at grocery stores, in city parks or offices or at restaurants. Coaches accompany clients to jobs to ensure they receive proper training and help to complete tasks. The goal is for clients to become independent enough that job coaches are with them only 20 percent of the time.

• **Health-related services:** Designed for individuals with medical conditions who require supervision and continued assistance. Provides clients with self-care and sensory stimulation training, interaction with the community and decision-making opportunities.

• **Emeritus:** For individuals who typically don't work because of age, regression of skills or by choice, but who want to participate in activities. Activities include college attendance, training to create a daily plan, learning to order food, managing finances and learning bus routes.

• **Supported employment:** Offers job opportunities for clients who have brain injuries, or psychiatric or orthopedic disabilities. Clients get to work in a group setting at grocery or hardware stores, auto dealerships, parks or manufacturing companies with job coaches.

Source: Vocational Visions



ED CRISOSTOMO, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Sarah Snyder, coordinator of the Emeritus program, conducts a safety class for participants Randall Constantino, left, and Elmer Buck during the Emeritus day program at Vocational Visions in Mission Viejo.

VISIONS

FROM PAGE 1

The Mission Viejo nonprofit organization provides work- and life-skills training and support services to adults with developmental disabilities.

The organization is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year. Vocational Visions began as a partnership in 1974 between Good Shepherd Lutheran Home of the West and Saddleback Valley Unified School District.

At the time, the school district wanted to provide its developmentally disabled students with a place after graduation to build on the education they received, former Executive Director Kathryn Hebel said.

Good Shepherd provided the location, and the district provided the teachers.

A year later, the organization became an independent operation, Hebel said. It receives state and school district funding, raises money through fundraisers and contracts with businesses to employ Vocational Visions clients.

The organization has grown to offer six programs that cater to its clients' needs and abilities, Executive Director Joan McKinney said.

People with disabilities have a sense of belonging at Vocational Visions, McKinney said. Clients like Constantino, who works eight hours a week shredding documents, can learn skills and earn money in the organization's workshop, where assembly, packing, labeling, shrink-wrapping and heat-sealing work is done for several companies.

Local employers include the city of Mission Viejo, where Vocational Visions clients do maintenance work at city parks, and area Albertsons and Pavilions stores, where they bag groceries, among other duties, said job developer Debbie Watkins.

"It has absolutely improved Mission Viejo because we are a more complete city, in that we are providing opportunities as best as we can ...

for everybody in the city," Assistant City Manager Keith Rattay said.

That is what makes organizations like Vocational Visions an integral part of the community, said Chris Rice, executive director of the California Disability Services Association, an organization that advocates on behalf of people with disabilities at the state level.

"It gives people with developmental disabilities a richer life, where they connect with a variety of people from the community, where they can form friendships with a variety of people, and there's a more positive outcome for everyone," Rice said.

Vocational Visions is also a place where parents and caretakers get the help - and the breaks - they need.

Jenni Nguyen, a single mother, said she can't imagine life without the organization.

Nguyen's son, Eric Truong, 24, has cerebral palsy, epilepsy and pachygyria, a rare developmental disorder that affects brain growth.

"It would be really hard for me," without the organization's help Nguyen said.

"It's a relief for me to have help and know he's safe."

Aside from his visits to Vocational Visions, someone from the organization comes to Nguyen's home once a week to engage Truong in physical activities such as stretching, Nguyen said.

Five years ago, when Constantino joined Vocational Visions, he said he didn't know what the organization had in store for him.

He wondered if he'd be alone, if he'd eat lunch by himself.

He never imagined he would hold a job, stand up for himself or have the confidence to consider starting his own shredding business, which his job has inspired, he said.

"Cerebral palsy is stressful," Constantino said. "But you know, there's nothing I could do with that."

All he can do is try his best, he said.

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CLIENTS ARE A DIVERSE CROWD

ROBERT "BOBBY" HICKS

Hicks, 61, of Mission Viejo, has been with Vocational Visions since 1977. Hicks, who has mild mental and intellectual disabilities and is legally blind, started with the organization's Daily Training Activity Program, which helped him obtain basic skills such as introducing himself, finding his way around, eating etiquette and interacting with others. Over the years, Hicks moved through various programs at the organization and is now in the Emeritus Program, where he is being trained to use his walking cane as his vision continues to worsen. He also participates in various activities, such as fishing, dancing, singing and playing games.

ELMER BUCK

After years working at Carl's Jr. and Target, Buck has retired. But the 69-year-old said he still has the energy for work and takes every job seriously. At Vocational Visions, Buck, who has mild intellectual disabilities and is diagnosed with bipolar disorder, volunteers in the organization's recycling program. He said he enjoys sorting bottles and cans and taking them to a recycling facility. Money from recycling pays for parties, games and gardening tools. Buck, who has been a client at Vocational Visions for eight years, said he loves to watch the local news and helps out wherever he can around the office. Above all, though, he said he loves to sing, and his dream is to perform an opera on television.

JENNIFER BURCH

Known as the "VV diva," Jennifer Burch, 36, loves socializing, helping others, putting a smile on people's faces, dancing and even gossiping a little. Burch, who has Williams syndrome and mild intellectual disability, has been attending Vocational Visions for 14 years. She said life is challenging at times, especially since being diagnosed with cluster headaches. Still, Burch said it's important to her to remain happy, outgoing and outspoken. Making Vocational Visions employees and her fellow clients happy brings her joy. "It's important to me because they have disabilities, also," she said.



Jennifer Burch

The rights of the developmentally disabled

Though reform and advocacy efforts preceded it, the modern rights movement for people with developmental disabilities began in the 1960s, when their parents and family members mobilized to bring awareness to the issue and work for social change through legislation.

Before then, public services were limited, and parents' primary option was to place their children in state institutions, from which they had no hope of leaving or engaging with the larger community.

Milestones of the movement include:

1963: President John F. Kennedy, in an address to Congress, urged the country to take "a bold new approach" to the "twin problems (that) are mental illness and mental retardation."

The approach included determining the causes of mental illness and developmental disabilities to prevent them; expanding training programs for and research efforts by mental health professionals; and improving programs and facilities for those with mental illness and developmental disabilities.

Kennedy advocated for emphasis on "prevention, treatment and rehabilitation" rather than "confining patients in an institution to wither away."

1965: In California, a legislative subcommittee on mental health that includes state Assemblyman Frank D. Lanterman issues a report that "calls for the state to accept responsibility for persons with mental retardation prior to state hospital admission through regional community-based services that would provide diagnosis, counseling and continuing services."

In response to the report, two pilot regional centers are established to provide those services.

1969: A follow-up report concludes the pilot is a success and the model should be expanded statewide. Gov. Ronald Reagan signs the Lanterman Mental Retardation Services Act, which promises services and support to people with developmental disabilities to help them live "the most independent and productive life possible." The state's regional center system is established.

The act is amended to extend the regional center mandate to include those with cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism and "other conditions closely related to mental retardation;" and to give people with developmental disabilities the same legal rights and responsibilities as others under the state and federal constitutions and laws.

1973: The federal Rehabilitation Act is signed, authorizing more than \$1 billion for job training and placement for people with disabilities. Section 504 of the act, intended to eliminate discrimination against people with disabilities, is not implemented until 1977.

1975: Congress enacts the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which mandates a "free appropriate public education" in the "least restrictive environment," regardless of the severity of a child's disability.

1990: President George H.W. Bush signs the American with Disabilities Act, establishing basic civil rights for people with disabilities, prohibiting discrimination in employment and "requiring accessibility in transportation, public accommodations and all government facilities, services and communications."

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act is amended and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, expanding the eligibility categories and required services of the initial law.

Sources: Regional Center of Orange County; National Archives; "The American Presidency Project," UC Santa Barbara; lanterman.org; California Department of Developmental Services

Hiring the clients of Vocational Visions

Montage Laguna Beach began employing Vocational Visions clients in 2003. General Manager Todd Orlich spoke about the business' experience working with adults with developmental disabilities.

Q. How did you get involved with Vocational Visions?

A. When we opened, we were looking for all kinds of ways to serve our community and be responsible, to everything from the environment to being a good community partner and a good neighbor.



Orlich

We looked at all kinds of programs, one of which was, who out there does this kind of work? Somehow we found Vocational Visions, and we talked to them and knew right away that they were who we needed to work with.

Q. What are the benefits of having employees with developmental disabilities work for your business?

A. Taking an active role and serving our community is who we are as a culture, and our associates - all of them - matter a great deal. And we take a lot of pride in providing a great work environment for all of them.

When our associates see us taking an active role and serving our community, it makes them want to do the same. ... It translates into a great service experience for our guests because of the pride they have working for a company where this matters.

Q. What are some of the challenges you have faced employing those with developmental disabilities?

A. I can't think of any challenges. It would be great to come out and see them work. You'll see that they're like everybody else. They all have special jobs that are geared toward different strengths.

Q. What surprised you most with this process?

A. What surprised me most is what great relationships we've been able to create with our various associates from Vocational Visions. They're friends. They're involved on a personal basis with the staff of the hotel. ... They became a part of our culture.

Q. What lessons would you pass on to other businesses considering hiring those with developmental disabilities?

A. Well, first, you have to learn. You have to understand the disability. You have to understand their different strengths ... and sometimes, the job needs to be specific to the individual, not just the group.

It's easier than you think. They have great coaches. Their families are involved. Vocational Visions has done a lot of work on your behalf as a business owner. You have to trust them.

You have to be passionate about it, and you have to make sure the staff you're working with ... knows what your goal is and what you're ambitious about, and they have to be supportive of it. Part of the success is how supportive our associates have been toward Vocational Visions.

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