



MurrayRidgeCenter  
HELPING PEOPLE...FOR A LIFETIME

# The View From The **RIDGE**

Lorain County Board of  
Developmental Disabilities  
**Fall Quarterly**

**FALL 2023**



The first day of the Brew it Smooth Cafe in the new school year! Pictured from left to right: Jayden Nagy, Brady Bella, Ja'Laysia Brown, Personal Aide Emily Barbee, Supervisor Stacie Starr, and Principal Dann Swift

## A New Year at Murray Ridge School!

Thursday, August 25th was the first day of classes for the 2023-2024 Murray Ridge School year! We would like to extend a warm welcome to all of our new students and staff members, as well as those returning for another great year of learning. Have a wonderful year, everyone!

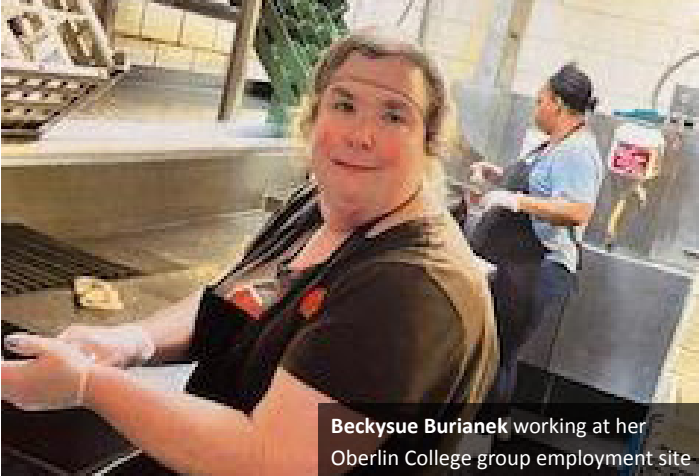


**Murray Ridge School**

**55 Years of Excellence**

For more than a half-century, our school has provided a positive and nurturing environment that enables students to develop functional skills in an environment that fosters self-esteem and a sense of accomplishment. In addition to a solid life-skills curriculum supplemented by academics, art, adaptive physical education, music, science, and more, students' classroom learning is enhanced by community experiences and volunteer opportunities.

# October was National Disability Employment Awareness Month



Beckysue Burianek working at her Oberlin College group employment site

## Supported Employment Spotlight: Beckysue Burianek

Beckysue works at several Supported Employment enclaves and lives independently in her own apartment. According to her Team Leader, Tracey Lewis, "Beckysue is kind, friendly, and she will go out of her way for others." Tracey adds that Beckysue "is hardworking and dependable," and that "she is always willing to go the extra mile for anyone." In her spare time, Beckysue likes to shop, bowl, and hang out with friends. Beckysue also enjoys participating in Special Olympics, especially softball. Beckysue likes cooking items in her air fryer and crockpot, and her favorite meals include meatloaf, soups, and spaghetti.

Murray Ridge Center was once again pleased to participate in National Disability Employment Awareness Month, an annual awareness campaign that takes place each October. We're proud to salute the Lorain County citizens with developmental disabilities who are part of the local workforce, and the local businesses that provide jobs for these individuals. Through our Supported Employment (SE) Program, Murray Ridge Center continues to focus on finding and placing individuals in positions where they can grow and excel in today's competitive job market.



Ashley Spradling working at Clearview/Vincent Schools.

## Supported Employment Spotlight: Ashley Spradling

Ashley is a participant in our SE Program and currently has two jobs performing custodial duties at Lorain Preparatory Academy and Clearview/Vincent Schools. She receives transportation from SE staff to and from her job at Lorain Preparatory Academy, and she walks to and from her job at Vincent Schools. In the past, Ashley has worked at Sears Hardware, Liberty Tax, the Brickyard, and Nutrition Group, as well as many group employment sites. Outside of work, Ashley lives independently in an apartment, likes listening to country music, and enjoys spending time with her nieces and nephews.

**October  
was Down  
Syndrome  
Awareness  
Month**



Did you know that each year in the United States, about 6,000 babies are born with Down syndrome? That's about one in every 700 babies born in this country. Down syndrome is the most commonly occurring chromosomal condition, and it is estimated that today in the United States there are more than 400,000 people living with Down syndrome. Since the 1980s, American families touched by Down syndrome have observed October as National Down Syndrome Awareness Month: a time to recognize that those born with Down syndrome can indeed live happy, long and productive lives. This past October, we celebrated our friends and neighbors with Down syndrome. To learn more, visit the National Down Syndrome Society website at [ndss.org](http://ndss.org).



## EOVC'S SELF-ADVOCACY LUNCHEON WITH THE ELYRIA MAYOR FRANK WHITFIELD

In September, some Adult Program participants at our Opportunity and Vocational Centers enjoyed a self-advocacy luncheon at the scenic Black River Tavern with Frank Whitfield, the Mayor of Elyria. The luncheon provided an opportunity for an open-ended conversation where the attendees were able to ask about local topics that are important to them. For example, they asked about such things as plans for the Midway Mall and efforts to upgrade Lorain County Transit and have better public transportation services.



Pictured, left to right: **Matthew Schoerverth, Michael Telloni, Benji Lewis, Elyria Mayor Frank Whitfield, Ashley Tarrant, and Latonya Mitchell.**

## 2023 Synergy Conference at Kalahari Resorts

In October, Murray Ridge staff accompanied individuals with developmental disabilities and their family members to the Synergy Conference at Kalahari Resorts. This annual event is designed to foster connections that encourage collaboration, innovation, and personal growth. At the conference, participants engaged in breakout sessions that covered topics like healthy relationships, self-advocacy, active participation in team meetings, as well as the different opportunities and resources available throughout Ohio. Additionally, participants had the privilege of hearing from DODD Director Kim Hauck. Our sponsorship of conference attendees was made possible by the Myrtle Endowment Fund of the Community Foundation of Lorain County.



Pictured, left to right: **Chelsie Jenkins, Michelle Miller, Kenny Martin, Annie Cirilo, Robert Serrano, and James Wilson.**



# MURRAY RIDGE HOUSING CORPORATION



Recent MRHC Board meeting attendees, left to right: MRHC Trustee **Ken Oswald**, MRHC Secretary **Pete Shilling**, MRHC Board Chairperson **Jerry Vessalo**, LCBDD Board Representative **Ryan Egbertson**, and MRHC Trustee **Bill Forthofer**.

In the late 1980s, alternatives to licensed group homes and residential facilities for people with developmental disabilities (DD) became available through "Supported Living," a model of home-based service delivery characterized by the separation of housing and services (no organization/individual can provide both housing and Supported Living services to a person with DD\*), and the requirement that no more than four people with DD live under the same roof. While Supported Living was designed to increase control of people with DD over their home environments and to promote community-integrated living, a major challenge of the new model was the very limited supply of rental property, particularly affordable

rental property, for groups of three to four adults – that's where non-profit housing boards, like Murray Ridge Housing Corporation (MRHC), came in. In 1992, the Ohio Department of DD began to administer a Community Capital Assistance Program through which county boards of DD and their non-profit housing corporations can access funds to purchase or build/renovate housing that is/will be rented to people with DD. The housing boards act strictly as landlord to their tenants (who are primarily people eligible for and receiving services funded/coordinated by county boards of DD) under lease agreements that comport with Ohio's Landlord-Tenant laws. After a large initial outlay of DODD 'seed dollars' to housing boards for property acquisition in the early 1990s, these boards became much more self-sustaining over time.

MRHC, which was formed as a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation in 1992, today owns 31 houses throughout Lorain County and has 113 tenants, all of whom have DD. Supported Living services for MRHC tenants are delivered by DODD-certified private providers; specified by service recipients and their support teams; included in Individual Service Plans that are written/overseen by Murray Ridge Service & Support Administrators; and funded primarily through Medicaid waivers that

are administered by the Lorain County Board of DD (LCBDD), and funded through a combination of federal funds (65.12%) and LCBDD dollars (34.88%). **In Lorain County, all involved have been extremely fortunate to have a housing corporation governed by highly committed and long-standing board members with significant expertise in areas relevant to the operation of the housing board.**

## Current MRHC Board Members:

**Jerry Vessalo**, Owner/ Midwest Siding

Company, *MRHC Trustee since 1998, current MRHC Chairperson*

**Terry "Pete" Shilling**, Attorney, *MRHC*

*Trustee since 2012, current MRHC Secretary*

**Tim McLaughlin**, Certified Financial Planner

with White Pines Wealth Management, *MRHC Trustee since 2018, current MRHC Vice Chairperson*

**Ken Oswald**, Semi-retired owner of

Carpentry by Kenny Inc., *MRHC Trustee since 2019*

**Bill Forthofer**, City of Elyria Engineering

Project Manager, *MRHC Trustee since 2022*

*\*There are some very narrow exceptions to this under the law.*



## MRHC'S ANNUAL CRUSHERS BASEBALL EVENT

Murray Ridge Housing Corporation hosted its annual trip to Mercy Health Stadium to watch the Lake Erie Crushers. This annual event, sponsored by MRHC, is a way that the housing board says "thank you" to its tenants; more than 75 of the tenants were present. Pictured, left to right: LCBDD SSA Manager **Nancy Hollins**, LCBDD Administrative Assistant **Jennifer Ryan**, LCBDD Superintendent **Amber Fisher**, MRHC Vice Chairperson **Tim McLaughlin**, MRHC Bookkeeper **Joan Hoover**, MRHC Trustee **Ken Oswald**, MRHC Chairperson **Jerry Vessalo**, and MRHC Trustee **Bill Forthofer**.

# Losses in the MRHC Family

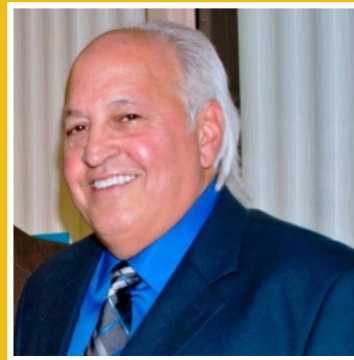
Sadly, the following four remarkable individuals passed away during their terms of service on the MRHC Board. Each having generously served on the MRHC Board of Directors for many years, we would like to recognize their invaluable contributions to Lorain County residents with developmental disabilities. Current MRHC Board Chairperson **Jerry Vessalo** provided below some warm reflections on these individuals and their contributions to the MRHC Board.



## Harold West

Served on  
MRHC Board  
1995 – 2011

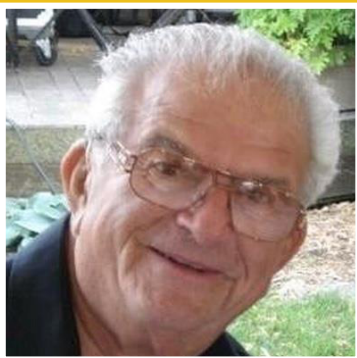
"Harold, our board's 'legal department', was a dedicated, honest, and true gentleman. He was totally dedicated to his work for the board."



## Stephen Ross

Served on  
MRHC Board  
2000 – 2018

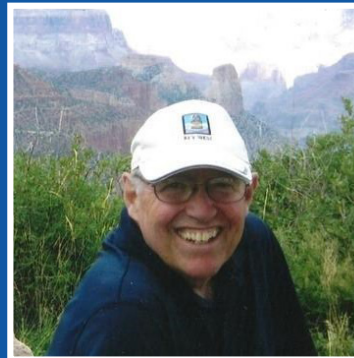
"Steve was a builder who brought real expertise to our board. He was a great asset for judging the quality of homes we were buying, as well as construction projects we needed to do on our homes."



## Lester Spike

Served on  
MRHC Board  
1998 – 2019

"Les was the real estate agent who became a real asset to our board at a time when our board was really growing. He was a wonderful person, a real joy for our board."



## Pete Barth

Served on  
MRHC Board  
2012 – 2023

"Pete was a real gentleman who had a great understanding of our tenants, their needs, and living conditions. His passing represents a real loss for our board. He will be missed."



## Donation from Your Turn Consignment Sale's Volunteer Opportunity

Murray Ridge Center would like to express a big thank you to **Bridget Boardman** at Your Turn Consignment for donating proceeds from her business's pop-up sale this past April! In addition to the generous donation, Bridget invited some of our Adult Program participants to volunteer at the sale, where they helped set up, stock, and take down the clothing displays. Community partnerships like this provide wonderful ways for the individuals we serve to engage with their community. We're looking forward to more opportunities to collaborate!



**Bridget Boardman** presenting Your Turn Consignment's donation to Superintendent **Amber Fisher**



**Vanessa Leighty** presenting Crystal Rock Inn's donation to Murray Ridge School Supervisor **Stacie Starr**

## Donation of School Supplies from Lorain's Crystal Rock Inn

Thank you so much to the Crystal Rock Inn for an amazing donation of \$800 worth of back-to-school supplies! This establishment in Lorain collected donations from its patrons throughout the summer and then voted on which school would receive the donation. Murray Ridge School was the unanimous decision! Crystal Rock Inn staff member and former Murray Ridge School teacher Vanessa Leighty personally delivered the school supplies. Thank you!



**Daniel Montgomery, Kenny Martin, Isaiah Wicks, and Joseph Linden** standing with members of The Amherst American Legion Post 118, with Special Olympics Coordinator **Shawn Hatcher**, and Coach **Russ Moyer** kneeling in front

## Amherst American Legion Post 118

The Amherst American Legion Post 118 held a "Poker Run" on August 12th to raise funds for our Special Olympics program! Their members have been long-time supporters of ours, and we'd like to thank them for their ongoing commitment to our agency's mission.





At our September Board meeting, Elyria Opportunity and Vocational Center Program Specialist Jim Nagy presented a check for \$1,220 to Friends of Murray Ridge on behalf of Mega Championship Wrestling (MCW). The generous donation was raised at MCW's annual Breaking Down Barriers event, which occurred for the eleventh time this past April. The family-friendly wrestling show was started in 2011 by Nagy and his co-promoters Jeff Traxler and Brandon Xavier for the benefit of Lorain County residents with developmental disabilities.

**THANK YOU!**



EOVC Program Specialist **Jim Nagy** presenting MCW's donation to Murray Ridge Center Superintendent **Amber Fisher**

## EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE AWARD PRESENTED



Board Member **Rebecca Cornman**, Murray Ridge School Teacher **Amy Daniels**, and Superintendent **Amber Fisher**

The most recent recipient of our Exceptional Service Award was **Amy Daniels**, a teacher at Murray Ridge School. "I have known Amy for several years," wrote Megan Costa, Amy's nominator, "and year after year she continues to be an amazing teacher and educator." Thank you, Amy, for your dedication to each of your students!

Do you know a Murray Ridge staff member who has gone "above and beyond"? If so, please submit your nomination to Kevin Naughton, Director of Communications, at (440) 329-3734 or at [kevin@murrayridgecenter.org](mailto:kevin@murrayridgecenter.org).



Lorain County Board of  
Developmental Disabilities

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Photo of the Month: The Murray Ridge Raiders Scarlet Team placed second at the State Softball tournament on September 16th! Standing, left to right: Coach **Leroy Keen, Jeffrey Torres, Daniel Montgomery, Ryan Eliason, Tim Dammeyer, Jeremy Foster**, and Head Coach **Russ Moye** Front, kneeling, left to right: **Hector Lozano, Bobby McFadden, Ryan Brown, Diana Clement, Jon Torres**, and Volunteer **Debbie Roberts**.

## Contact Us

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