

# Bittersweet Spectrum



Fall 2021



R-E-S-P-E-C-T: *Growing Closer in Challenging Times*



# Letter from the Executive Director

Members and Friends of the Bittersweet Farms Community,

Happy autumn! I hope this newsletter finds you healthy and well. With the turning of the seasons and the approaching close of 2021, it is again time to reflect on the many accomplishments we have had the joy of witnessing and being part of over the past year here at Bittersweet Farms.

In spite of the countless challenges of the continued pandemic and the rapidly growing constraints of an unprecedented workforce shortage, over the past year we continued to fulfill our mission to positively impact lives. We are fueled by our collective dedication to the inspiring people we serve and strengthened by a daily commitment to our Core Values.

This year, our team has chosen our Core Value of "Respect" as the theme for this newsletter. This theme is certainly fitting because the accomplishments we highlight here, and the countless others we experience every day, would not be possible without respect as our foundation. It lies within our success of keeping our participants, employees, and community safe and healthy through the preventative measures and protocols we practice each day. Respect is central to our recognition and appreciation for Bittersweet participants as distinct individuals with unique gifts, and our commitment to support them through the person centered approaches which best help them learn and grow towards their goals and dreams. Respect is evident in our aim to serve our greater community through our Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, and the many partnerships and projects we have fostered to give back to the community over these difficult times. In turn, the crucial support that we are so fortunate to receive from our faithful donors, volunteers, and allies highlights the respect that the community has for the people we serve, and the recognition for what Bittersweet can do for them with access to the necessary resources.

This past couple of years have been trying for all, and unfortunately, it appears that we will have continued storms to weather together in the months ahead. In these times, I am comforted by the strength and determination of the Bittersweet Community, and know that together we will overcome whatever struggles lie ahead for the sake of those we serve and the legacy and promise of Bittersweet Farms.

I humbly thank each one of you for your vital contributions toward our success, and for your understanding, compassion, flexibility, friendship, aid, and respect. I hope the remainder of 2021 is enjoyable for you and yours, and I look forward to our continued success together in 2022 and beyond.

Sincerely,

*Austin*



*Please note: some photos included in this newsletter were taken prior to COVID-19.*



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...and those whose lives they touch.

# Respect the Game...Beth is USA Games Bound!

This year for her 60th birthday, Beth got the surprise of a lifetime! Representatives from Lucas County Special Olympics, along with a fleet of local reporters, surprised Beth with this life-changing news: she was selected to represent the state of Ohio in the 2022 Special Olympics USA Summer Games!

Beth spent the morning of her birthday disc golfing in the community, and when she returned home to the Farm, her fellow residents, staff, and participants were ready to welcome her home. The group gathered under the guise of singing "happy birthday" and presenting her with a birthday gift.

Her gift was more than she ever could have imagined, spelled out in bold silver letters.... U-S-A--G-A-M-E-S! When the news hit her, Beth screamed and nearly fell over with excitement! "I was speechless," she said. "I could hardly believe it!"

Beth is no stranger to high-level Special Olympics competitions. For decades, she has competed at the state-level in both swimming and skiing, bringing home dozens of medals. Although she's proud of her accomplishments, she has always had her eye on the prize: national competition.

"This has always been my dream," says Beth. "I'm hoping I can own the top of the podium on this!" The national competition will be held in Orlando, FL from June 4-12, 2022. She is already counting down: "Florida, here I come! I will give it all I've got! Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in my attempt!"

Kelley Watson of Lucas County Special Olympics says, "Beth has been with our program for over 30 years and she has always dreamed of being part of the national competition. We have just been waiting for her to be chosen...this is truly a dream come true for her!"

Although the competition is nearly a year away, Beth has been diving into training already! The YMCA of Greater Toledo sponsored her training with a complimentary pass, and she has been training weekly in the pool at the Wolf Creek YMCA. Beth says she is "working on endurance and swimming" and is thrilled she gets to "live in the pool for a while."

This accomplishment has its roots in our history. Beth was one of Bittersweet's first residents and has called the Farm "home" for nearly four decades. Since Bittersweet's founding in 1983, our philosophy has emphasized aerobic activity and active lifestyles. Beth's remarkable achievements are the fruit of decades of hard work inspired by this philosophy.

Executive Director, Dustin Watkins, says, "This is such an honor for Beth and for Bittersweet. Beth exemplifies everything Bittersweet is about and we know she will represent us well. We are so excited to support her as she trains and to cheer her on next year in the national competition!"

For updates on Beth's training and journey to the 2022 Special Olympics USA Summer Games, follow Bittersweet on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/bittersweetfarms](https://www.facebook.com/bittersweetfarms)) or Instagram ([www.instagram.com/bittersweet\\_83](https://www.instagram.com/bittersweet_83)).





# A Safe Space for Fun, Learning, and Respect

Special thanks to the Ar-Hale Family Foundation, the Dana Foundation, and the Walter Hoehn Family for making this project possible!



The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged all of us to think outside the box, and as usual, Betty's Farm has risen to the occasion! This year, with the support of some generous donors, a covered outdoor patio for programming was added in Lima.

Day Program Manager Jerry Hunt says, "It has been a lifesaver for our programming. We use it daily, because we know that as long as COVID-19 is with us, it is safer to do things outside. In the warmer months, we use it more than we use our indoor classroom spaces!"

So long as the temperatures are mild, each day at Betty's Farm begins and ends in this fabulous outdoor space. In the morning, staff and participants check in with one another and learn life skills. Throughout the day the patio is used for various activities: the participants play corn toss and pass the ball to promote aerobic exercise, and the Betty's Boppers practice their singing and dancing for the day when they are able to safely perform in the community again.

Finally, in the afternoon before heading home, the participants gather in the covered patio to reflect on what they have learned that day and who they were able to help at their daily volunteer site. These conversations foster a sense of respect for each other and everyone they meet in the local community.

In addition to providing a space for programming, Betty's Farm uses its new addition for participant arrivals and departures during inclement weather. Looking to the winter, this space will provide shelter from snow and ice for the participants and the Farm's vehicles. Season to season, we are grateful for the program space and crucial participant safety made possible by this new addition!



## We Salute Our Direct Support Professionals!

Every day at all three Bittersweet locations, our dedicated team of Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) supports our participants. Modeling relationships of respect and partnership, our DSPs are truly the backbone of Bittersweet's mission, positively impacting the lives of the participants and their families on a daily basis.

Each year, we celebrate our DSPs by honoring the team members who go above and beyond by exemplifying Bittersweet's Core Values: Respect, Help First, Empathy, Achieve Together, and Learn & Grow ("RHEAL"). Congratulations to these DSPs recognized by their peers for "keeping it RHEAL!"

### RESPECT:

Day Program - Robin Stone  
ICF Residential - Diego Zapata  
Community Living - Ariel Kolhofer

### LEARN AND GROW:

Day Program - Melanie Sears  
ICF Residential - Abbey Sehnert  
Community Living - Amanda Wilgus

### HELP FIRST:

Day Program - Beth Kuntz-Wineland  
ICF Residential - Mari Driscoll  
Community Living - Mary Fuzinski

### RESPECT, HELP FIRST, AND EMPATHY:

Lima - Rob Foreman  
Pemberville Transition- Alex Jablonski  
Pemberville Community Living-  
Ragen Gadkostik

### EMPATHY:

Day Program - Matt Wolfram  
ICF Residential - Rachel Gilmore  
Community Living - Ryan Mack

### ACHIEVE TOGETHER:

Day Program - Gena Robinson  
ICF Residential - Jennifer Roberts  
Community Living - Megan Ocke

### ACHIEVE TOGETHER AND LEARN & GROW:

Lima- Sonja Stanford  
Pemberville Transition- Jenna Flick  
Pemberville Community Living-  
Amy Graalman



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# Successful Transition Takes All of Us



In the Pemberville Transition Program, students not only complete their high school journey, receiving their diplomas; they also prepare for a successful transition into young adulthood. This means practicing life skills and planning for what comes after graduation.

This year, it was Zach's turn to make the transition, and we are happy to report that he is adjusting well to this new season of life! He recently graduated, moved into a residential home at our Whitehouse location, and began work in the Whitehouse Day Program.

Josh Foxhuber, the Intervention Specialist who worked with Zach, reflected on Zach's time as a student in the program:

*"Zach experienced tremendous growth in our program over the past few years. He started out with social and emotional challenges and*

*was only able to focus on simple, familiar tasks for short periods of time. With lots of hard work, Zach developed into a happier and more sociable young man. Some of his favorite things are dancing, watching DVDs, and listening to music.*

*Zach is non-speaking, but he is very expressive through other means. He enjoys groundskeeping tasks, especially using a wheelbarrow, which also helps to meet his sensory needs. In the Transition Program, Zach has proven himself to be smart and capable. We wish him the very best with his future growth in the Whitehouse Day Program!"*

Lindsay Ott, one of the Direct Support Professionals who has been working with Zach in the Whitehouse Day Program, shared a bit with us about his transition, "I've enjoyed working with Zach so far. He loves spending time outside and he is such a hard worker." During Day Program, he can often be found outside weeding, picking up sticks, collecting pine cones, and enjoying the natural beauty of the Farm.

Bittersweet's philosophy emphasizes the importance of structure for individuals with autism, and Lindsay described one way the team has used structure to support Zach's transition: "He always looked forward to his ride home from school at the end of the day, so we have been going on rides to take recycling or walk at local parks at 2pm." This consistent schedule is one of many ways Bittersweet has provided a strong foundation for Zach's success.

Zach's story showcases the value of collaboration between Bittersweet team members, programs, and locations. From Pemberville to Whitehouse, the Bittersweet team respects one another's wisdom and loves to come together to support the individuals we serve. We look forward to seeing what Zach's future holds! With an 80-acre Farm to explore, new housemates to have fun with, and several vocational programs to try, the possibilities are endless!





# Growing Veggies and Community at Betty's Farm



Gardening has been part of life at Bittersweet from the very beginning, and this tradition is alive and well at all three of our locations! This year, the participants at Betty's Farm experimented with new raised bed garden boxes and had great success!

This spring, each participant was given their own garden box. Don Snook, a supporter of Betty's Farm, donated handmade signs with each participant's name for their garden box for a special, personal touch. Each participant had the opportunity to choose which veggies they wanted to grow in their box this year.

Since our founding in 1983, Bittersweet's philosophy has emphasized meaningful and motivating work. We have found that processes like gardening-- with a clear beginning and end, observable progress along the way, and a rewarding end result-- are immensely beneficial for people with autism. Growing their favorite veggies in their own garden boxes provides even deeper meaning, motivation, and sense of responsibility!

Betty's Farm invited the community to join the gardening fun, too! They offered garden boxes to the families of participants and staff and to participants at Marimor Industries, another provider serving people with disabilities in Allen County. This enabled people to come together safely outdoors all season long, growing community alongside their veggies!

Day Program Manager, Jerry Hunt, shared that one of the participants from Marimor was able to return to his passion for gardening after several years without a gardening space of his own. Hunt's own grandsons, Jakxon and Jeremiah, were also able to garden this year for the very first time. "If it weren't for Betty's Farm," Hunt said, "they never would've had an opportunity to enjoy this experience."

When it came time to harvest, the seeds of community also yielded fruit! The participants had the choice to take their produce home, share with one another, or donate it to Our Daily Bread, a food pantry in Lima. Many of them chose to share their harvest with one another and the local community. The families who enjoyed the produce remarked that it was far more flavorful than the produce from the store and even from their own home gardens. This is the difference that love, care, respect, and community make.

The participants and staff at Betty's Farm are already dreaming about next year's garden boxes! This year, there were 27 garden boxes on site at Betty's Farm. Next year, they plan to add nine more! Of course, in addition to growing more veggies, they are planning to grow more community, too! Hunt says, "We hope to invite more providers from Allen County to bring their participants out so we can all garden together."

Time will tell which veggies the participants choose to grow next year, but this much is certain: relationships, community, love, and respect will continue to grow in the fertile soil of the garden boxes at Betty's Farm!





# *Growing Job Skills, Mutual Respect...and Fresh Veggies!*

Mike has worked in the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program at Bittersweet Whitehouse since its beginning more than a decade ago. When asked about his experience working in the CSA this year, his first response was frank and all too familiar: "Well, we're still in a pandemic."

Although the Day Program was closed during the 2020 CSA season, Mike and his housemates assisted with watering each day-- a safe outdoor activity and meaningful way to contribute. This year, with the Day Program back open, Mike and the other members of the Gardens team were able to return to indoor work to support the CSA program, such as packaging shares and providing customer service.

We like to say that in the Gardens program, our participants grow produce from seed to harvest, but it is really so much more than that! The "so much more" is exactly what they missed last year and what they have been honing with newfound passion in 2021.

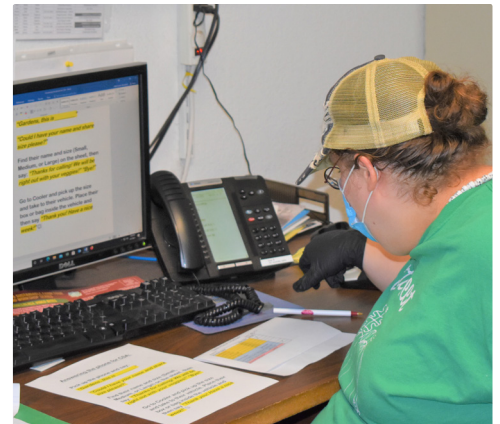
Developing customer service skills has been a top priority this year for Mike, Lynn, Tom, Dan, Beth, Ben, and Matt. On CSA pick-up days, one of these team members is stationed near the phone in the Gardens office, ready to receive calls when customers arrive. After speaking with the customers when they arrive, they check their name off the inventory sheet, get the correct size share from the cooler, and deliver it to the customer's vehicle.

While the continued risk has required the team to continue with curbside, contactless deliveries for now, that has not stopped the participants from connecting with the customers! After sharing his initial thoughts about the pandemic, this connection is what Mike named as his favorite part of working in the CSA program this year: "My favorite part is when the customers call me on the phone. I pick up and say 'hello.' Then they tell me their name and I take their share to their car. I like that I get to see them and talk to them. I am proud that I can help them independently."

Lynn also spoke of her pride to represent Bittersweet's CSA: "I like that we offer quality produce at an affordable price. Because of the pandemic I mostly talk to the customers over the phone. They are nice and professional and I am too."

Reflecting on the participants' growth this season, Gardens Specialist, Beth Kuntz-Wineland, says, "In addition to promoting job skill development, the customer service element of our CSA program provides meaningful social and relational interactions. The participants learn how to interact with the customers respectfully and to build a relationship with them week after week. In this time of social distancing, these connections have been so important, not just to the participants but to our CSA members as well."

In addition to cultivating relationships of mutual respect, the Gardens team has also been growing some gorgeous produce! Each week, the participants are proud to share the tomatoes, potatoes, greens, herbs and more that they have grown. When the customers return week after week with positive feedback, everything comes full circle. Not only are the participants growing by offering respect and appreciation to our customers...they are growing by receiving respect and appreciation in return.





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*Relative has autism	

## Bittersweet Gives Back to Local Family Touched by Autism

This August, the Bittersweet community had the extraordinary opportunity to give back to one of their own: Jet, a young boy on the autism spectrum, and his family. Bittersweet was proud to partner with Maumee Valley Habitat for Humanity for a Playhouse Project build, which provides playhouses to local children in need. On the morning of the build, the Habitat team arrived at the Farm with all of the wood, paint, and tools to build the playhouse.

In just one day, a team of Bittersweet participants and staff painted the wooden panels and trim, built the playhouse, cut and nailed the singles on the roof, and worked together on the final touches. Jet loves books and his sister loves flowers, so some of the special touches included book racks filled with children's books and flower boxes complete with live flowers grown by participants on the Farm. At the end of the day, the family arrived to see the playhouse for the first time. There were tears, smiles, and gratitude all around! The participants were so proud to serve their own community in this way, and Jet's family was touched by the extraordinary gift.

Bittersweet's mission is to positively impact the lives of individuals with autism *and those whose lives they touch*, and on that day we were able to live our mission fully. Jet's parents shared that his smile when he saw the playhouse was the biggest smile of his entire life. It was an unforgettable moment, and with that smile, Jet touched our lives, too.



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