

OAK LEAVES

Oak Park, IL

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DECEMBER 24, 2008

Businesses partner with cerebral palsy center to provide work opportunities

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Music lover Andrew Wesson, of Chicago, has spent every Tuesday morning for the last three months at Val's halla Records, sorting and alphabetizing old 45s.

The work, arranged through the United Cerebral Palsy Levinson Center in Oak Park, helped the 58-year-old quadriplegic experience a work routine while doing something he enjoyed.

"Every Tuesday morning, unaccompanied, Andrew would drive his power wheelchair down Harrison Street to Val's record store," said Nathan Wagner, supervisor of the Levinson Center, 332 Har-

risson St.

Once at Val's halla Records, 239 Harrison St., Wesson would make himself at home among the vintage records.

"The only problem was the limitation of his mobility," said store owner Val Camilletti. "We had to find something that he could do which was alphabetize the 45s."

Camilletti said the 45s are in better order than they've ever been.

"He came on Tuesdays for about an hour and he wanted to be paid in old R&B music CDs from the '50s and '60s," Camilletti said. "He is quite a music lover."

When all the 45s were organized, a project that took about three months,

Camilletti said, "I didn't want him to leave, but I couldn't figure out other jobs, because of his mobility. I haven't given up and I'm trying to come up with something else for him."

The work opportunities are an extension of the Levinson Center's work program that started with a discussion the Oak Park Arts District had in August. There was no work program that linked Center participants with local work opportunities before then, Wagner said.

"I started at (United Cerebral Palsy) last November (2007) and noticed that businesses on Harrison weren't connected with us and thought we should be," Wagner said. "So I said,

although there are challenges, our participants do have some skill sets."

Wagner said the idea of the program is not for full- or even part-time employment, but rather providing an hour or so of productive involvement in a work environment.

"Val and (Buzz Cafe owner) Laura (Maychruk) were there and were so enthusiastic, and made it easy for me to call them," Wagner said. "We ironed out what people might be able to do."

Beryl Skeel, another program participant with limited mobility, is working at Buzz Cafe, 905 S. Lombard Ave.

"It's been wonderful for her and for us," Maychruk said. "She comes in on



PHOTO BY PETER WAGNER

Andrew Wesson, who works through the Levinson Center Day Training program, sorts and alphabetizes 45s at Val's halla Records, 239 Harrison St., Oak Park.

Mondays and folds the cleaning towels and is very eager and upbeat.

"When I told her she was hired, she squealed with laughter," Maychruk added.

The Levinson Center's day program has 19 participants from Oak Park, surrounding suburbs and Chicago. Participants range in age from 22 to 60.

"We have classes ... that include cooking, computer, woodworking, art and we go over how to advocate for human rights," Wagner said.

Wagner said he is working on getting a portable ramp so that Center participants can access more businesses in the area.

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