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 **Dakota**Communities

august  
2009 newsletter

# we do



You may have fond memories of the “lazy, hazy days of summer.” While nostalgia has its place, you’ll see in this newsletter that summer at Dakota Communities means busy, fun-filled times.

Peggy Mehen, one of our Wellness Partners, says, “**I’m doing it!**” At Dakota Communities our motto could be “**We’re doing it!**” Activities range from engaging in and taking ownership for personal wellness and health, to wilderness adventures in the Apostle Islands, to sharing the joys of food and music with families and friends closer to home.

While all these activities are fun, they are also much more. Innovative partnerships for wellness are resulting in increased health and energy for the people of Dakota Communities. Our joint venture with Woodwinds Hospital is the only one of its kind in the nation. Because eating well is one of the foundations of living well, we are piloting a new menu system that emphasizes healthier relationships with food and nutrition. And through camping and canoeing, hardly spectator sports, Dakota Communities participants built leadership and social skills in the wilderness, returning

home more empowered to make a difference in their world.

Because of your support, we’re able to offer these types of exciting, innovative opportunities at Dakota Communities to support and encourage people with disabilities to live full lives.

**Thank You!**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paula Hart". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and personal.

Paula Hart  
*President and CEO*

“Our motto could be  
***We’re doing it!***”

# Dakota Communities | mission

Dakota Communities partners with people who have disabilities to **realize their potential** in their lives and communities.

# we do



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President and CEO

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## 1 ways to wellness

# Partnering for Wellness

Just short of a year ago, Peggy Mehen and Rita McAninch-Hastings, Senior Advocate at the 3801 Broadway home, paired up for Dakota Communities’ **Ways to Wellness** program. Peggy, a 36-year-old resident at the home, had already been exercising daily and losing weight through Weight Watchers® and was excited to learn more about health and nutrition with Rita.

“Ways to Wellness is an incredible program,” said Rita. “It’s an individualized program adapted to a person’s needs based on their level of physical functioning. And it’s a whole-body approach to wellness, addressing nutrition, the mind, and a holistic approach to exercise.” For Peggy, Ways to Wellness has broadened her exercise beyond the treadmill to include yoga, weights, exercise balls, and boxing – a new favorite. Ways to Wellness has also taught her how to weave wellness throughout her life and share what she has learned with others. “Peggy has become my fitness coach! She challenges me and the other staff and people in the house to exercise and eat well.”

**Ways to Wellness**, a joint initiative between Dakota Communities and Woodwinds Hospital, is an individualized fitness, nutrition, and weight management program that helps people meet their wellness goals.



## 12 Weeks, 22 Healthier People

Begun in the summer of 2008, the program has already been a great success. Participant results during the initial 12-week launch included:

- An average weight loss of **13.6 pounds**,
- An average BMI decrease of **5.4 points**, and
- An average waist measurement decrease of **1.7 inches**.

In addition, 59 percent of the participants reached their body composition goals and 77 percent met their fitness and lifestyle goals. Other improvements included consistent exercise; healthier menu planning and snack choices; decreased fatigue, stress, and joint pain; and improved overall fitness, flexibility, strength, mobility, self confidence, and personal relationships.

In reflecting on Ways to Wellness, Rita said, “It’s very affirming. It’s a whole-life program that’s meant for life, not for the minute. As a result of Ways to Wellness, I’m more aware of the choices I make each day. And because of the program, Peggy not only thinks wellness, she lives wellness.”

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wilderness inquiry

# A Gateway to Adventure

This past June, 10 people served by Dakota Communities participated in Wilderness Inquiry's Gateway to Adventure Training Trip. They spent the weekend exploring northern Wisconsin's beautiful Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. Throughout the weekend, the participants learned and practiced basic camping and paddling skills. Together as a large group, they explored the backwaters of Lake Superior, hiked through the north woods, and practiced leadership and social skills. The next step for many of these participants is to go on an integrated, extended wilderness trip later in the summer. On these trips, they will have countless opportunities to use the skills they learned on the Gateway training trip.



## 10 More Outdoor Adventurers

**Gateway to Adventure** is an innovative program that gives adults with disabilities the skills they need to enjoy outdoor experiences in a more supported environment.

"I had a lot of fun on the trip and learned a lot about camping."

– Paul

"I liked camping. My favorite part was the hiking. I want to do it again."

– Jenny

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nutrition

## Eating Well. Living Well.

At Dakota Communities, we made a commitment to create well, whole lives for the people we support. In order to fulfill that promise, we needed to evaluate the food people ate every day. We quickly realized we had focused on convenience and efficiency, not health and nutrition. Our menus consisted mainly of pre-packaged foods and were nearly void of whole grains and fresh ingredients.

Having come to that epiphany, we were overjoyed when Julie Jones, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus at St. Catherine University, agreed to create a new menu system for Dakota Communities with her students. The new menus are naturally low in sodium and fat, and contain the ingredients essential for maintaining fitness and overall good health.



From left to right: Professor Julie Jones, Brittan Leiferman, Dawn Vedders, and Kim Nguyen

Not Pictured: Leah Jasper and Anna Purjwari

During meal preparation, I have seen the individuals laughing and trying a wide variety of foods.

– Hannah Palbicki, Program Coordinator at Poppler  
(Pilot home for the new menu system)

The people at Dakota Communities have heartily embraced the steps we have taken to offer better nutrition. In addition to using the new menus, they have begun visiting local farmers markets, growing their own vegetables, baking and grilling instead of frying, drinking less soda and more water, and increasing physical activity. Moreover, by proudly sharing their accomplishments, they have ignited a journey toward health that has become the culture at Dakota Communities.

be healthy



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philanthropy

# A Tribute to Your Generosity

We asked. You answered! Before Mother's Day, we asked our friends, families, and supporters to help meet a tribute challenge from one of our generous donors. In short, if Dakota Communities receives 200 tribute gifts (gifts in honor or memory), by year end 2009, a generous donor will make a gift of \$10,000 to our Basic Wishes Fund.

With your help, we are on our way to making this happen. Since Mother's Day, you have responded by making over 120 tribute gifts. One of our friends passed this tribute challenge on to her friends and family and her "network" sent in more than 25 tribute gifts. An employee asked her women's group to help with the tribute challenge. They added 10 more tribute gifts. What a difference a group of dedicated people can make. **Thank you!**

Dakota Communities' **Basic Wishes Fund** provides funds for people served by Dakota Communities to participate in leisure activities such as concerts, family vacations, pet therapy visits, and Wilderness Inquiry trips.

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family fun day

# A Fun Day! for Families at Como Park

On a sunny day in mid-June, Dakota Communities hosted its annual Family Fun Day at the Como Park Pavilion in St. Paul. More than 500 people enjoyed delicious food, games, face painting, and a special guest appearance by Tony Redmond as Elvis.

We'd like to say a special thank you to the Employee Quality Council and Andrea Hefty for making all the arrangements for this fabulous day, and to Denise Forner for standing out in the cold at 5 a.m. on January 2nd to reserve the pavilion! We also thank our games coordinators (Rhonda Arendt, Colette Durr, Maia Xiong), face painters (Amy Wartick, Sheryl Grover, Lisa Math), and all of our guests for making the day at Como so memorable and enjoyable.



**Family Fun Day** is an annual social event hosted by Dakota Communities for staff, families, and the people we serve.

## More than Halfway to Our Goal of 200 Tribute Gifts!



The best news is that through the Basic Wishes Fund, people at Dakota Communities will continue to live full lives in community. They will participate in hiking and kayaking with Wilderness Inquiry's Gateway to Adventure trips; volunteer with Meals on Wheels; enjoy carefree picnics in the backyard with friends, family, and roommates; and take their pet therapy dogs on summertime walks.

Check on our tribute challenge progress and make a gift at [www.dakotacommunities.org](http://www.dakotacommunities.org). Together we can do so much. You make a difference! Gifts may also be mailed to: **Dakota Communities, 680 O'Neill Drive, Eagan, MN 55121.**

**Dakota Communities**  
Creating Magic Gala Celebration

**September 26, 2009**  
6:30–10:00pm  
Circus Juventas, St. Paul



Excitement is building for our 2009 Gala on **September 26!** Mark your calendar for a wonderful evening, including a live circus performance, and help us create our own magic for people supported by Dakota Communities.

Visit [www.dakotacommunities.org](http://www.dakotacommunities.org) for further details or to register online for this adults-only event. Contact us at **651.688.8808** with questions.



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