



JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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Release At Will

Giamos Marks Nearly 40 Years of Service

STEUBENVILLE-Helping adults with special needs has been a long-term commitment and a labor of love for Conni Giamos, who directs the Jeffco Training Center in Steubenville.

Since 1976, Giamos has assisted special needs adults in their quest to gain independence through employment or everyday activities. This fall has marked her 39th year of service with the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities and each day has left her feeling blessed.

“It’s been a journey,” she said. “It’s been a good journey.”

The Weirton resident was studying to become an elementary schoolteacher at Marshall University when she took a summer job at Huntington State Hospital helping people with special needs. That experience opened her eyes and led her on a different path.

“It clicked in. It was there, and from then on I moved with it. I wanted to come home. I started working as a substitute at the former Dunbar School and heard there was an opening [here].”

Giamos took the job as a specialist in the habilitation department of Jeffco Workshop, which included two buildings dedicated to serving adults with developmental disabilities. The Jeffco Training Center specialized in habilitation services and helping consumers with daily living skills, while the Jeffco Production Center offered consumers the opportunity to work in a variety of jobs.

“From there, it flourished to being able to work in different areas and meeting a lot of people and seeing a lot of programs. We got bigger and at the high point we assisted 240 people,” she said. “We worked with people from development centers from Cambridge to Apple Creek.”

Among the highlights of her tenure with Jeffco was gaining contracts with the Ohio Department of Transportation, American Electric Power and area churches and putting consumers to work performing janitorial services, in addition to having employees on the job with the likes of McDonald’s and other local businesses. They also participate in activities at the center, such as dances, musical productions and holiday events. Meanwhile, they give back to the community by interacting with residents at nursing homes and helping at the Urban Mission.

Currently, Giamos is in charge of the training center, Community Employment Services (CES), and individual plan development for all consumers who attend the workshop. She also interacts on a monthly basis with the Jeffco Non-Profit Board and offers suggestions for program improvements. The number of consumers has since decreased and the training center currently assists an estimated 80 adults. Despite the changes, she still relishes the experience—and she still keeps a paperweight from her student teaching days as a reminder of how far she’s come.

“I always knew special education was going to be the thing. It’s something that’s in your heart,” she said. “I’ve had a lot of laughter, tears, highs and lows, but it’s my world. It’s been a very good journey.”

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She now has a new focus and is working hard to integrate individuals with developmental disabilities into the Jefferson County community. She wants consumers to have the opportunity to live, work, and play in the area and her first priority is finding them jobs through CES and identifying new recreational opportunities.

Giamos has worked with three superintendents during her nearly four-decades-long tenure, and they all speak highly of her capabilities.

Sam Mauk, who served as superintendent from 1975-84 and first hired Giamos at Jeffco, said she was on hand throughout the entire adult program and worked her way up the ranks.

“She volunteered to handle programs in the new building [on Cherry Avenue]. She was enlisted to do the whole development of the Jefferson County Training Center. She was instrumental in the whole design, development, and establishment of programs that exist there,” Mauk commented. “I can’t imagine how many consumers were touched by her dedication to the division of the physical facilities and the programs that are in place there today. It takes a lot of commitment and she’s managed to do that for a long time. I express my sincere appreciation for all that she’s done.”

Rick Pfannenschmidt, who worked for the JCBDD from 1973 to 2008, began as an employee in the workshop and later served as superintendent for 24 years. He recalled working alongside Giamos and found her to a valuable part of the operation.

“Connie is one of the most qualified individuals to work in our system throughout these 40 years. She constantly kept her focus on trying to make the consumers’ lives better, being there to support them, and developing programs and systems [to help them]. She truly cares about the people we work with and she cares about her staff,” Pfannenschmidt added.

Current Superintendent Mike Mehalik heralded her for her commitment to the consumers.

“During the late 1970s and 80’s, Conni was involved in bringing consumers home from state developmental centers. She was always there for the parents and family members who needed her help,” Mehalik noted. “She worked with individuals by helping them learn how to succeed in our community. She has been a real asset to the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities.”

Furthermore, Giamos says she enjoys it right where she is.

“It’s all about the consumers,” Giamos added. “I’ve always said it’s not me, it’s not you; it’s all about them. It’s something I think that when in this profession, I would never want to go anywhere else.”