

## STUART JAMES NAMED EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE ABILITY CENTER

The Ability Center is pleased to welcome Stuart James as the new Executive Director of The Ability Center effective October 2021. Following an extensive nationwide search that began in November 2020, James was selected to lead the organization into its next century of service supporting individuals with disabilities. He came to the independent living movement seven years ago as the Executive Director at the historic Center for Independent Living in Berkeley, California.



James began his career working for the New York Rangers. His affection for sports led him to become a sports agent, representing athletes in team and action sports. Experience in entertainment landed him in Beijing where he launched his own media company, Wheels Plus Wings. He once produced a commercial for Reebok that was named Golf Digest's Best Super Bowl Commercial.

With more than 20 years in the media industry, James thrives on telling a good story and uncovering new ways to look at disability.

*"It's an incredible honor to be named the Executive Director at The Ability Center. This organization has successfully served the Greater Toledo Area and Northern Ohio for more than 100 years, and I'm thrilled to have the opportunity to lead this wonderful group of people as we begin the next century of service."*

*"My personal goal has always been to change the lens with which society views disability and raise the expectations people with disabilities have of themselves. I want children to dream beyond the boundary of their disabilities and those with newly acquired disabilities to realize, all the aspirations they had before their accidents or diagnoses still exist. They may look different, but they still exist and we're here to help them find the way."*

*"My family and I are very much looking forward to settling into the community, and my twin three-year-olds are looking forward to introducing themselves to the puppies."*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stuart James". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

# "Our Lives are changed now until Forever"

Ethan of Toledo receives a ramp | Grant provided by Elks Lodge 53

"Knowing that this ramp opens opportunities for when Ethan learns how to use his chair, for him to be able to go outside on his own - that may be years and years down the road, but the fact that that's now possible is such a great feeling. Receiving this ramp from The Ability Center has changed our lives from now until forever," Megan, Ethan's mom shares.

Safe, reliable, and a symbol of freedom, our ramps are crafted with care for each family in our community. Ethan's morning routine will include more snuggle sessions and longer cartoon episodes because less trips to the car are needed to get the family ready to take on the day. More time to just be a kid.

Megan shares, "Getting a ramp ourselves was not feasible at this time. Life is much easier because of the ramp. I don't think people who give to The Ability Center realize how much their donation impacts people's lives."

The family's home has been passed down through generations of Ethan's family and will now be accessible to him as he grows and continues to enhance his mobility. "His face lights up when he sees the ramp. Sometimes we drive up to our house and we still can't believe it's ours," shares Megan.

His circle of support is strong - friends and family sport shirts with Ethan's name and disability to not only raise awareness but to rally around Ethan during any challenges he faces.

Because of this donation, Ethan will never know a life of not being able to get out of his home. To donate to similar projects through the Home Accessibility Program, visit [abilitycenter.org/donate](http://abilitycenter.org/donate).



# CELEBRATING A CENTENNIAL OF SERVICE

100 amazing years were celebrated under a starlit tent surrounded by those closest to our mission. Ability Center friends from past and present honored our outgoing Executive Director, recognized Hall of Fame inductees, and welcomed our new leader. Guests marveled at artmaking with artist Chilly Rodriguez and laughed along with special guest America's Got Talent's Josh Blue.

*(Jonathan Bartholomy with Josh Blue)  
(Executive Director Stuart James)*



*(Meg Ressler, Cathy Netter, Kadee Anstadt)*

## HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

Throughout our 100-year history, many people dotted the pages of our history book and made notable contributions to the disability community. Six members compose the inaugural class of our Hall of Fame.

*Bios of recipients can be found at [abilitycenter.org/centennial](http://abilitycenter.org/centennial)*



### **Renee Wood**

Leader, advocate, award winner, trailblazer, board member of many organizations.

### **Other inductees:**

Alva Bunker  
Arvella Sander  
Ed Nieshoff  
Matt Sterling



### **Edward Schmako (Larry Schmako shown accepting award)**

Active civic and community leader, dedication to generations of students and alumni of The University of Toledo.



Stickers will be placed on each book

## DREAM PROJECT

DREAM (Disability Representation, Education, and Awareness in Media) ensures books by, for, and about people with disabilities are widely available. Stories addressing growing up with a disability, describing victories of the movement, and social opportunities are themes in the collection of books being read by local school districts.



Copies of the books from the DREAM collection in multiple formats are available at each Toledo Lucas County Public Library location.



*Awesomely Emma*, a story of true inclusion based in an art museum, will be sponsored by The Toledo Museum of Art for the DREAM book collection.

A comprehensive list of schools participating in the Reading Challenge and collection of books can be found at [abilitycenter.org/dream](http://abilitycenter.org/dream).

## ACCESSIBLE COMMUNITY FUND

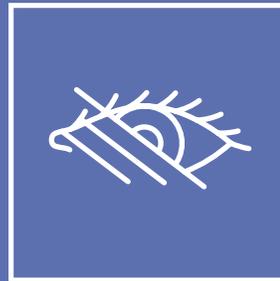
A \$100,000 donation from Toledo Refining Company launched a new initiative to fund accessibility projects in the community.

The Accessible Community Fund will award up to 50% of the total project cost for community organizations to make accessibility improvements or upgrade existing features.

The Ability Center will match every dollar donated to the fund from corporate partners.

Projects funded by the Toledo Refining Company will be selected from East Toledo.

Examples of accepted projects include:



Audio signals and loops and lighting/color contrasting for visually impaired



Elevators, lifts, and other mobility assistive devices



Accessible portion of community playground



Ramps, power door operators, accessible doors, and levered handles



Barrier free bathrooms

Application can be found at [abilitycenter.org/accessiblecommunityfund](http://abilitycenter.org/accessiblecommunityfund)

## A SHOW WORTH CELEBRATING

Over 400 guests joined us at The Pinnacle in Maumee to showcase local fashion and more importantly, acknowledge programs creating independence for people in our community.

"As Chairs, we are humbled by the amount of support our fashion show received from our community. When Karen Lumm and I first decided to go ahead with this event, we had no idea what to expect. It had been a long and hard year for all dealing with COVID-19. Little did we know the tremendous support we would receive." shared co-chair, Clarie Browning.

\$40,000 was raised and will fund college scholarships, ramps, assistance dogs, and more.



(Amanda Bell, Ability Center staff member)  
(Co-chairs, Claire Browning and Karen Lumm)

## NEXT STEPS SUMMER PROGRAM

We believe youth who work become adults who work - our Next Steps Summer Program transforms students into accomplished young leaders. Students engage in skills to pay the bills curriculum, and master employability training through paid work opportunities.

During a traditional year of the Next Steps Summer Program, youth live on the campus of The University of Toledo during weekdays of the program with Ability Center staff. Independent living skills such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, time management, hygiene, and more are explored to prepare students for attending a college or university. View photos, videos, and testimonials at [abilitycenter.org/nextsteps](http://abilitycenter.org/nextsteps).

### Employment Partners 2021



Sylvania Area Family Services  
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## Empowered Outcomes

"My anxiety was reduced by learning my communications skills."

"[I have learned] how to look for an interview."

"I think that people think I can't do jobs like this, but I also think they're wrong."

"I plan to get a job using the skills I have gained through the program."

## JOIN OUR FAMILY!

Puppy raisers and fosters are needed to continue our mission of creating independence for people with mobility disabilities and those with developmental disabilities.

Volunteers assist with basic obedience and manners during weekly training sessions and above all else, have fun! Direction from helpful staff and a network of veteran fosters will guide you through the training process. If interested in learning more, call 419.885.5733 or fill out an inquiry form at [www.abilitycenter/volunteer](http://www.abilitycenter/volunteer).

## Welcome Grads!

### **Kevin H. & Myrtle**

"Indy was a miracle for our family. When we got Indy, Kevin had a great deal of anxiety going to school. Indy would jump on the bed to get him up in the morning, which significantly decreased his anxiety with school. She also gave Kevin and his siblings the confidence to interact with other peers their age," shares Kevin's mom. Myrtle, a two-year-old Labrador retriever, will be Kevin's successor dog. "One of the best things about a therapy dog is that they attract all the dog lovers to you. Therapy dogs invite people to interact with children with special needs, and that has meant so much to our family."

### **Jack W. & Dobby**

Jack has participated in Agility Angels since the program began so he and his family understood the impact a dog can have. Dobby, a two-year-old Labrador retriever, provides companionship, decreases anxiety, improves communication skills and sense of security when home alone. Jack and Dobby now attend Agility Angels every week, and run different agility courses together. Jack's mother shares, "Since bringing Dobby home, this is the happiest that I have ever seen Jack."

### **Brent Fry & Ron**

"A service dog brings a sense of friendship and entertainment to my life. I am getting the help I need every day to put my socks on or pick up items." Brent received Ron, a two-year-old Labrador retriever, to balance while walking and assist with household tasks. Ron even acts as Brent's assistant during carpentry projects around the house. He shares, "Ron impacts my life in such a positive manner, and I want nothing more than same caring and loving life for him."

### **Chris C. & Nimbus**

"From my experience, I know what a lifesaver a service dog can be and what they can do for me; then in turn I do not have to rely as much on other people or my husband," shares Chris. Nimbus, a two-year-old Labrador retriever, helps Chris transfer in and out of her chair, open doors and drawers, and retrieves the telephone. Chris is a retired veterinary technician and always keeps Nimbus on his paws - trips to Costa Rica, airplane and boat rides make Nimbus a frequent traveler. Chris says, "I know my relationship with Nimbus is unique and goes beyond companionship to a true partnership. That's what I'm looking forward to the most."



**Susan H. & Skye**

Susan is currently obtaining her master's degree in Mental Health Counseling from Bowling Green State University. Skye, a two-year-old black Labrador retriever, will fit right in with her busy routine and offer support as she completes internships and enters the job market. "I'm very lucky to have a supportive family, but I really love living on my own and being independent. I get help with minor tasks, such as picking up dropped items, reaching things, and opening doors," explains Susan.

**Tom W. & Roman**

"Having a service dog helps me feel more confident and comfortable when meeting and talking to people. My dog also helps me get undressed and pulls bed covers up at night, and retrieves clothes, shoes, and braces," says Tom. Star, Tom's first service dog, took wonderful care of him for many years. Roman, a two-year-old black Labrador retriever, will now fill the role of support system and companion for Tom. "I give a lot of love and attention. Roman gets no shortage of pets and kisses!"

**Holly K. & Flare**

Holly is a dynamic veteran who travels all over the country competing in wheelchair races. A dog trainer based in Cleveland, Ohio, Holly also works as a substitute teacher and is active in her church.

Flare is a two-year-old Labrador retriever and helps Holly reach things, pick up dropped items, and pull her socks off. Holly says, "I try to be as independent as I can, but there are just some things I need help doing. When I'm out in public, I feel like people ignore me or look over me, not knowing what to say to someone in a wheelchair. When I had Glory, my first service dog, they smiled and were able to start a conversation with me. I can give my dog all my love, and take care of them while they take care of me!"

*To read more on these and other stories, visit [abilitycenter.org/success](http://abilitycenter.org/success).*





# The Ability Center

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#### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Stuart James

"This is for the future of the community. You never know when you may end up in a situation where you are unable to drive. It doesn't have to be disability-related, it could be financial – you just never know. If this levy passes, we will have better infrastructure for it." Lisa Justice, TARPS rider

The Ability Center proudly supports transit for all - a lifeline for those with disabilities.



*Alex Bodi, TARPS rider*