

# The Safe Haven Way

A Parent Publication of Safe Haven Farms, Butler County, Ohio

FALL 2017



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RESIDENTIAL, DAY & COMMUNITY PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS WITH AUTISM

## Welcome Seth O'Malley

By Lisa Eccles



Seth O'Malley, the Choices in Community Living Director of Services at Safe Haven Farms.

Seth O'Malley greets me in his bright office with an engaging smile and welcoming spirit. The new Safe Haven services program director has an easy manner and progressive style regarding the farm's continued success and growth, and he's passionate about improving the lives of participants and staff.

"There is so much positive energy here," says the Huber Heights native. "We have the chance to build on the staff's willingness to accept and learn from the participants. By re-exploring their interests and supplying support, we can help them grow in many ways. They want to contribute, not just be pushed into an activity that we assume they want."

Seth's insight represents philosophy far removed from old-line practices of "warehousing" individuals with disabilities. He partially credits a Choices in Community Living (CICL) documentary which educated him on outdated and woefully inadequate policies. His personal experience growing up and befriending a boy with special needs who lived next door also prepared him for his role. They attended high school together and keep in touch today.

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## Karl Matson Joins the Board of Directors

Safe Haven Farms, Inc. is delighted to welcome Karl Matson to its Board of Directors. Karl is a recently retired business executive from GE Aviation, with over 39 years in the Aviation field, including 7 years as a pilot with the US Air Force.

Karl brings a wealth of experience leading complex organizations and managing multi-million dollar commitments. In addition to his business expertise, Karl recently completed a decade of experience on the regional Board

of Directors for the American Red Cross, leading collaborative initiatives across city and county agencies committed to relief of human suffering and recovery from major disasters.

Karl comments, "As the father of our precious daughter Kara, who has multiple disabilities resulting from both Down Syndrome and Autism, as well as several unrelated medical needs, my wife Michelle and I are committed to being life-long advocates in advancing knowledge, re-

sources and support networks for individuals and families dealing with disabilities."

Karl is active as an Elder with his church, and also serves as the Board Chairman for a global prayer & discipleship ministry reaching both children and adults across 35 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. His combined wisdom and knowledge will be a valuable addition to the deliberations of the Safe Haven Board.

### Share the Love x 4

Great food, good friends, tremendous prizes! The 4<sup>th</sup> annual **Share the Love** fundraiser dinner for Safe Haven Farms will be held on Thursday, February 15, 2018 at the Grand Finale in Glendale, OH. Watch for your invitation.

After January 2, 2018, you can register online:

[www.sharethelovewithshf.myevent.com](http://www.sharethelovewithshf.myevent.com)

We need sponsors. If you or your business can sponsor this popular event, please contact Leslie Odioso, at 513-574-6376 or [leslie.odioso@gmail.com](mailto:leslie.odioso@gmail.com). We are still lining up raffle prizes. Could you donate the use of a timeshare or vacation home? If yes, please contact Leslie Odioso.

*Seth O'Malley, continued from p.1*

Seth's journey began as a direct-support professional, and then progressed to manager of several residential properties. This first-hand knowledge taught him to honor those he served and also to have as much empathy for personnel. "They are making such a positive impact on peoples' lives," he said. "You have to respect and understand everything they do and the stress related to it." He also admires Safe Haven's "extraordinary" family support, which is rare and critical to the program's success.

Community involvement is high on his list of priorities. He plans to expand Safe Haven's reach beyond the current Pendleton produce sale and art programs, agricultural projects, recycling and field trips. He envisions more "repeat" visitors to the farm with regular activities to build on the

neighborhood connections already in place. For example, he foresees using the farm's ball field for outside team practices as a way of naturally developing relationships with farmers and utilizing the property. Seth dreams of increasing the day program as well, with a possible two shift program where participants who aren't early risers can come in later in the day. "Not everyone's a morning person," he quipped.

The new director can often be seen walking around the grounds and interacting with staff and farmers—the self proclaimed "suburban kid" is still learning horticulture from farm staff. He enjoys the animals as well, and is the proud "dad" of Bailey, a Bernese mountain dog mix who has taught him another important lesson: "Animals, like people, take time to build relationships and trust."

## Taking Our Stories To Washington

**A**s this newsletter has previously described, the Center for Medicare & Medicaid services issued a bombshell regulation in 2014 that would restrict Home & Community Based Services (HCBS) to residents living only in widely distributed urban settings. It would preclude funding to participants in settings designed to serve the needs of a specific disability and also settings in rural communities—a double whammy for Safe Haven Farms. For the past four years, Safe Haven advocates have been working with advocates around the country to protect the rights of our sons and daughters to choose where to live without losing their government benefits.

On June 14 of this year Denny Rogers, Safe Haven parent, joined a delegation from Together for Choice to meet with key Senators and the Director of Medicaid in Washington D.C. Together for Choice is a national advocacy group “uniting to protect and advance the rights of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to live, work and thrive in a community or setting of their choice.”

Before meeting with the new Medicaid Director, Brian Neale, the group met with legislative staffers from Ohio Senators Sherrod Brown and Rob Portman’s offices to enlist their support.

In the afternoon meeting with Medicaid Director Neale and six of his senior staff, the group discussed their concerns with restricting residential options for individuals with I/DD, both from a legal and human rights perspective.

Denny shared his daughter Emily’s story. He explained how unsatisfactory urban settings had been for Emily before she moved to Safe Haven Farms—contrasting harrowing urban stories with her more peaceful life now. Emily is doing very well—participating in farm life, social events and community trips. She has many friends in her rural community and is happier and more engaged than she has ever been. Judith Jackson shared a similar story about her daughter, Annie, who lives at Heartbeat Farm in VT.

The point was to illustrate that one size doesn’t fit all when it comes to residential settings. Some individuals might thrive in an urban setting, but others like Emily and Annie might not. They need options

to choose the setting that best meets their individual needs and interests.

Director Neale listened attentively and commented that the HCBS settings rule was well intentioned, but had “unintended consequences” for some individuals. He appreciated hearing Emily’s and Annie’s stories so he and his staff could better understand some of these consequences. He said

he wanted to work with Together for Choice and take advantage of their members’ expertise while they consider what to do about the rule. He also wanted to hear from other families about the impact the rule might have on their families. While things are chaotic in Washington these days, the group left D.C. hopeful that they had made a difference in Medicaid’s thinking.

As a follow up, Together for Choice collected 180 other letters from families around the country (including several from Safe Haven parents) in support of preserving choice and presented them this fall to Director Neale.

They have also expanded their contacts with other legislators on behalf of the cause.



Meeting with Senator Sherrod Brown’s staff.  
Left to right: Philip Peisch, Attorney, Covington & Burling; Scott Mendel, Chairman, Together for Choice & parent; Judith Jackson, parent from VT; Denny Rogers, parent from OH.

### Make a Gift to Support our Mission!

Your generosity can help us meet the costs of operating our large enterprise and bring joy to the lives of those we serve. We are fortunate to have received several grants over the years for new projects, but most grants do not fund ongoing operating expenses.

Won’t you please return your tax-deductible check in the enclosed reply envelope or donate online and help us continue our mission!



*Thank You*

### Buy Me Some Peanuts & Crackerjack . . .



Thanks to the generosity of GE Aviation, our farmers had the opportunity to see the Cincinnati Reds in action. GE gifted us with tickets for 8 people to see 4 games. The packages also included food and parking passes. Can you tell our gang enjoyed themselves!



Picnics, swimming, hayrides, trips to the zoo, hanging out at the park, enjoying fresh-picked veggies from our gardens . . . Ah, Summer, we'll miss you! But we love Halloween, too!

## Horticulture Update from Mike

Mike Rogers, Farm Specialist, reports, "This amazing weather has allowed us to extend the growing season. This year, we've grown many new varieties of veggies, herbs, flowers & fruits, helped along by 'floating row covers' that keep the bugs away. Our 2 main goals for next year are a pumpkin patch in the back fields and learning how to care for an orchard full of fruit trees. We have made some wonderful connections with companies, churches, Pendleton artists, and many others while seeking weekly volunteers!"



## Broadening Safe Haven's Community Presence



We are making many friends and 'regular' customers at the Pendleton Arts Center veggie stand where several Safe Haven participants spend their Tuesday afternoons greeting cus-

tomers and working on projects in the studio. The farmers have been welcomed there, and some warm relationships have developed.

Case in point: Enclosed with a recent donation from Pendleton artist Amy Baird, she wrote the following, "Our father has been changed and there is no doubt that he is a better person because of his relationship with [Safe Haven's] Pete Collins. I have a studio

in the Pendleton Art Center in Middletown and have been privileged to spend time with both the residents and the staff. I have watched my father squirm as he has grown to know and love Pete and as he has learned more and more about autism.

"Thank you for not only what you do for the residents and participants at "The Farm" but for how one crusty old man at a time, you are changing the community for the better. Peace to you!"

Recently, Amy and her father, David Dohn, surprised farmer Pete by attending his birthday party at the farm.

The weekly "feed run" is another example of an expanding community relationship. Day Hab participants gather supply needs from all of the programs and go to Diver's Garden & Pet Supplies to fill the week's orders. On a recent trip, one Diver's employee commented that those Monday shopping trips "made his week," as he looked forward to his interactions with the farmers and getting to know many of them personally.





## Welcome Improvements—North Pasture Fencing, Eagle Scout Firepit

Perhaps he didn't originate it, but Robert Frost once wrote in his poem "Mending Wall" that good fences make good neighbors. Safe Haven Farms has many good neighbors and most have good fences and welcoming gates. We want to be good neighbors, too.

Thanks to the great efforts of Jason Tinch and the financial help of Guardian Savings Bank and their employees, we recently completed a new fence that extends more than a quarter of a mile along one of the boundaries of our 60-acre farm. It was built by the well-regarded Hamilton Fence Company, with able assistance from Bill Ison, Farm Manager and farmer Jim Wilson, Assistant Farm Manager.

The fence allows the farm's animals to roam and gives easier access to our farmers who enjoy walking through the scenic pastures and hiking on the impressive system of trails, most of which were constructed as part of several Eagle Scout projects.

With the completion of the fence, the farmers now enjoy an extended morning walk. The ritual morning hike serves to build comradery among the farmers and staff, while delivering a healthy dose of exercise therapy to all, including the animals that accompany them.

As they return from their walk to the main campus of the farm, they are better prepared to pursue their chosen activities for the day. Some will choose ani-

mal care, some arts and crafts, others planting, tending and harvesting.

All will make frequent trips during the week into the surrounding communities. Some will work on our recycling program where they pick up materials like cans, which are brought back to the farm to be processed and crushed by the farmers—one of their favorite activities—before being sold and delivered by farmers to recycling companies. Some may go to agricultural concerns to buy animal feed and farm supplies. Others will deliver produce and eggs to customers or sell the produce from their farm stand in downtown Middletown. Still others may take their handmade arts and crafts to their shop in the Pendleton Center where they offer them for sale.

But sometimes it's just eating out, going grocery shopping, or being entertained at various venues such as recent trips to see Cincinnati Reds games or watching sky divers from Smith Park.

Whenever they return to a place they've been before, they are greeted by friendly

neighbors who know their names. Good neighbors, mostly—ones with good fences and welcoming gates.

—Gary and Rena Blevins, parents of farmer Teresa.

Gary and Rena comment, "It was our pleasure to coordinate and assist with construction of this good fence."



Teresa and staff member Margaret at the fence

Eagle Scout candidate Nathan Wendt from Troop 725 based in Trenton at Mt. Olivet Presbyterian Church recently reconstructed our fire pit for his Eagle Scout project. Nathan's mom, Lori Wendt, volunteers in the Safe Haven equestrian program. Nathan's project included planning and raising funds for

materials, supplies, and tools. Volunteers from troop 725 and their family members helped mightily with the

construction. Nathan had leftover funds and kindly donated it to the equestrian program. Double nice!



## Yes, John, . . . You're Going to Disney World!

**A**s someone once paraphrased William Shakespeare, "So shines a good deed in a weary world." Staff member Allison Turner understood how very much resident John Pastorius wanted to make a trip to Disney World. Over the years, John had been a frequent visitor there with his parents, but this had not been possible for the past few years, John loved to talk about Disney and the fun he once had on the rides. Could there be a way Allison wondered to get John back to the place that had given him so much pleasure?

Allison got her inspiration from social media. She first contacted John's father and relatives in Florida for permissions and then created a GoFundMe account to raise the money for John's trip. When the funds were raised, off they went to Disney World for 7 days, with Allison paying her own way. Like



Allison, John and Minnie

many with autism, John had never flown before and Allison wondered how he would handle it, but she said he did amazingly well, aside from getting nervous while landing. They enjoyed staying at the Caribbean Beach Hotel and taking buses to all the sights and as an added plus, John was on the dining plan so he could eat whatever he wanted!

He loved the parks, shows and fireworks, but he most enjoyed boat rides like 'Pirates of the Caribbean' and 'It's A Small World.' Allison discovered that

### 'Walk On' a Labor of Love

The third annual Walk On for Autism fundraising event was held over Labor Day weekend around the lake at Voice of America Park in West Chester. Despite the blustery weather, the event brought out 110 walkers on a Saturday morning. Walkers, sponsors, and volunteers enjoyed miniature horses, craft painting, and balloon animals, with food and bottled water donated by Kroger. The event planning committee extends deep gratitude to our Gold, Silver, and Bronze sponsors! We look forward to seeing all our supporters in 2018 on September 22.



he was a picture addict and they waited in many lines to get pictures with all the Disney characters.

During the week John met with his Aunt Sharon, who lives in Florida. In a message afterward, Sharon wrote, "I can't tell you how much our John has thrived since his move to Safe Haven. He has lost 50 pounds or more and is smiling and talking. We were taking pictures and John put his arm behind me to stand closer. His hand gently touched my



John with Aunt Sharon

back. It was the first time ever that I have felt his touch. Maybe a very small thing, but I nearly cried. I have never been able to hug him and that small touch meant so much to me."

Allison, your act of caring for John's happiness reminds us that big ideas can be accomplished through the individual support of others. Thanks to those who made this good deed happen!



## Safe Haven Farms

### Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 633  
Monroe, Ohio 45050

### Property Address:

5970 No Mans Rd.  
Middletown, OH 45042

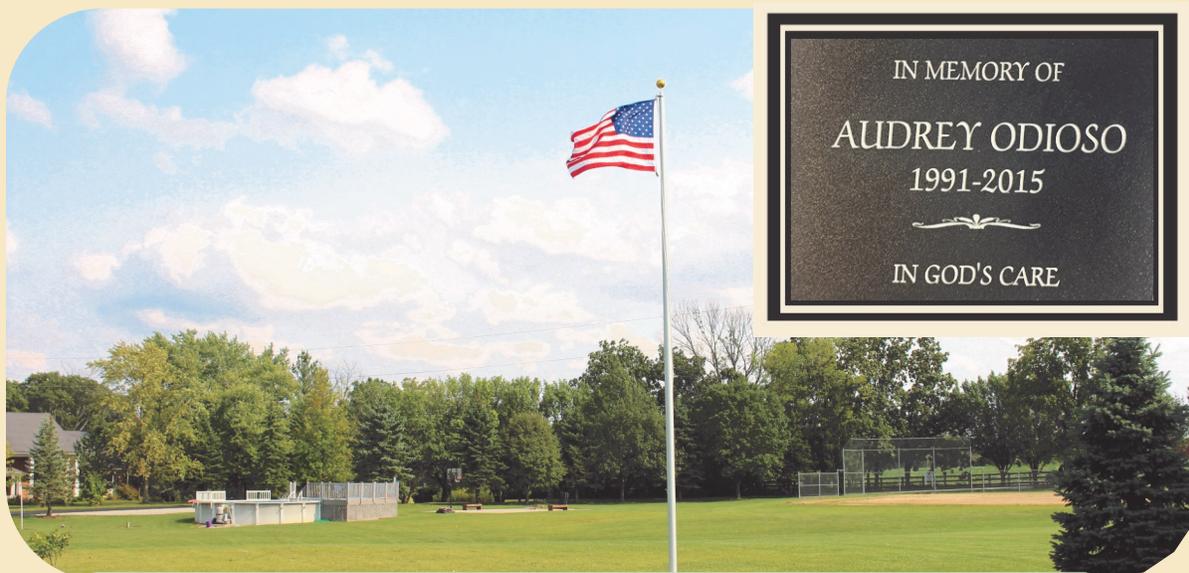
**513.422.1880**

[www.safehavenfarms.org](http://www.safehavenfarms.org)



*February 15, 2018*

*Share the Love Dinner, Grand Finale, Glendale*



A flag now flies at Safe Haven Farms to commemorate our friend Audrey.

