

50 Years of Hiawatha Homes



Our Story Begins With Home – And Families

June 2026

“Our Story Begins With Home,” but it doesn’t end there. A home is not a home without family. Hiawatha Homes is fortunate to have the support of many families: the individuals we support and their families, our staff, and our community. Our family would not be complete without our donors, individuals, and businesses that provide crucial philanthropic support to Hiawatha Homes.

As part of our 50th anniversary celebration, we honored our longtime supporters last month at a Garden Party held at Mayowood Stone Barn in Rochester. Cindy Ostrowski, CEO of Hiawatha Homes, welcomed guests and presented a short history of the organization, future challenges, and our deep appreciation for our family of donors. Larry and Jan Tarnow shared their experiences as long-term supporters, and the satisfaction it has given them. Special guests at the event Darin Koster and Linda Armagost were featured in a video discussing their relationship in a heart-warming story about the true meaning of family.



Jan and Larry Tarnow have supported Hiawatha Homes for years and spoke to our organization’s importance to guests during the donor recognition event in May. Larry was also a board member at Hiawatha Homes for many years.



Darin and Linda were guests of honor at our donor recognition event. Pictured with Darin and Linda (middle) are Lucas Stiemsma, Program Supervisor for Hiawatha Homes, and Stephanie Haedt, Linda’s daughter.

When staffing was short on weekends, she would bring Darin home with her. She had a young family, and initially her children were curious. Why didn’t Darin walk? Why did he need leg braces and a wheelchair? After a simple explanation, they were off with Darin to play.

The entire family bonded with Darin and planned for Darin to attend holidays and special family gatherings. There were times that Linda’s children would remind her to bring Darin home.

He attended everything with Linda and her family: the children’s school and sporting events – music programs, wrestling matches, hockey, softball, and football games. And the Armagost family attended Darin’s events.

There was always a party for his birthday in September. They all went to the Twins’ victory parade after their World Series win.

Darin went with the family on fishing trips. He visited the kids when they left for college and attended their graduations and weddings and baby showers and christenings at their insistence.

And on April 5, 1999, Linda became Darin’s legal guardian.

Darin and Linda

Darin has cerebral palsy, uses a wheelchair, and communicates via adaptive technology devices. He is very social and likes concerts, movies, and sports. Darin was one of the original residents when the Hiawatha Children’s Home opened in 1976. He eventually transitioned to the Hiawatha Adult Home, and then to Cascade House, the first waived community home in Minnesota.

In 1984, Linda joined Hiawatha Homes as a direct support professional. Later on she became a supervisor of the Cascade House and then joined the nursing staff.



Darin and Linda in 1999

“My role is to be his voice and to be his advocate,” says Linda. Darin can call Linda anytime if he has concerns. It is important to Darin to have someone he can trust and depend on.

He values conversation and activities with others, especially with Linda and her family. “Being seen and being heard.” They both feel it continues to be very important to always have open communication between them.

Linda is now retired after working at Hiawatha Homes for 30 years, but Darin is as much a part of her family as he ever was.

“But Darin and I are both 40 years older!” she says, and they have had to adjust.

Their activities are more sedate. And there is a new generation of Armagosts.

One of Linda’s granddaughters kissed Darin’s foot, thinking that she could “kiss it and make it better.” That granddaughter is now a pre-med student.

Darin and Linda laughed as they shared a story from Easter. Another little granddaughter slipped Darin jellybeans to eat – too many jellybeans at once. Darin started to choke and had to spit out a mouthful.

“Darin, if you can chew better the next time we won’t get in trouble,” she very seriously told him. Those two are not giving up on jellybeans!

And Darin’s experience at Hiawatha Homes? **“I feel like I belong here. I feel safe here.”**

He likes being surrounded by staff who care about him and provide consistency. People who respect and value who he is. People who understand that all of us have good and bad days. “Our Story Begins With Home” and with those people in our lives who are unconditionally supportive, respectful, and trusting. We at Hiawatha Homes are incredibly grateful for our many overlapping circles of family, and for the many ways that they enrich the lives not only of the individuals we support, but their birth families, our staff, our supporters, and our community.

We should all be so lucky to have a Darin or a Linda in our lives.

And a few jellybeans.



Linda and Darin now.

I want to support 50 more years!

Our Story Begins With Home



HIAWATHA HOMES
Est. 1976

Make your gift online at:
hiawathahomes.org/50

Consider becoming a monthly donor where \$50 a month supports Hiawatha Homes for years to come.
Mail to: 1820 Valkyrie Drive NW, Rochester, MN 55901

First/Last Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Email: _____

This gift is: __In Honor of __In Memory of
Name: _____