June 5, 2009

Ken Thomas is the Recipient of the 2009 Synergy Partners Consumer Advocate of the Year Award

Ken Thomas and Ron Ostroff

Ken Thomas is a deserving candidate for the Synergy Partners Consumer Advocate of the Year. I have worked with Ken for the past 15 years at Services to Enhance Potential and he has impressed me immensely with his self advocacy skills. He schedules and attends all of his medical appointments independently. He seeks out his own recreational activities and interests. In the last couple of years, he has shown an interest in getting involved in community groups that serve and assist persons with disabilities.

At his annual plan of service meeting, Ken expressed a desire to become a member of the STEP Advisory Committee. He served on the committee that year and was one of the most active participants, listening to his coworkers, bringing their issues to the committee and participating in coming up with solutions to their concerns. As his interest grew, so did his drive to get more involved at the community level.

Ken began participating in community experiences through the STEP program. This afforded him the opportunity to become knowledgeable about groups supporting those with disabilities. He is an active participant at the monthly Community Mental Health meetings at the Arc Detroit and does not miss a meeting! He consults with our community skills trainer who provides him with information regarding upcoming meetings such as the People's First Group. He is a member of the ARC Detroit as well.

After getting involved with the assistance of STEP, Ken became independent in seeking out his community advocacy. He participated in the NAMI walk last year at Belle Isle and was able to raise money for this worthy organization. He also attended the Walk a Mile in My Shoes Rally in Lansing. This year, Ken spoke with one of friends who he motivated to get involved as well. He called some friends he met on the local NAMI walk and found out about the March on the Capitol to be held in Lansing this May. The two of them arranged transportation to CMH so they could attend. Ken requested to be a volunteer at the event and his contact, Steve Kuhlman, accepted his offer!

Ken Thomas and Rachel Kendall

Ken was very involved in the Special Olympics throughout his years at STEP. Special Olympics, due to limited funding, started holding games for school age participants only. Ken was disappointed so I suggested that he become a volunteer. Without any assistance, Ken used his computer to locate contacts to see if he could become a volunteer. He called several numbers before locating the appropriate contact.

Ken's drive, perseverance, and determination are extraordinary. When he has an interest or desire, nothing can stop him. I have no doubt that Ken will continue to evolve his advocacy skills even more over time. I have been very lucky to work alongside Ken for so many years. He has, and will continue to be, an advocate for persons with disabilities.

Nomination Submitted By: Rachel Kendall