



Saturday, March 03, 2012

## No boundaries: Headwaters offers unique photography class for people with disabilities

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David Hobbs' smile slowly stretches from ear to ear as his hands move carefully over a small, red digital camera. With the utmost care, he shows his visitor where the battery is and how each button works.

"I've got something to tell you," he divulges. "I bought a camera, it's the same as this only it's a different color."

Hobbs, a charter participant in Headwaters Inc.'s photography program, has become quite a shutterbug. He is so enthused about his new hobby not only has he purchased a camera of his own, he has updated his business card to include his new skill.

The card reads "David Hobbs: Art, scrapbooking, photography and all around nice guy," he announced proudly.

Sharon Winter, day services manager at Headwaters, said Hobbs' pride in his photography skills illustrates the benefits of the fledgling program.

"The whole idea of the class is to learn hobbies that they can all do on their own when they're done with the class, and not just be dependent on being here with us and doing it here, and also there's always the potential for them to maybe make a little money on the side," she said.

Winter said the program has proved to be so popular in-house, Headwaters has decided to take it on the road. Photography classes for people with intellectual challenges will be held in Minocqua, Eagle River and Crandon starting this month.

The class will meet one day per week for two hours at the public library in each community and will begin with individual meetings with each student the week of March 12. Classes will begin March 19 and continue for 12 weeks. The Crandon student meetings and subsequent classes will be held on Tuesdays. Classes will be held in Minocqua/Woodruff on Thursdays and in Eagle River on Fridays.

New registrants are accepted up to the first day of class and the cost of the course is \$175. After completing the course, each student is given a photo book with some of their photos. Students will also have one of their photos professionally framed and matted.

Participants will learn how to use a digital camera (provided for use during the class by Headwaters), compose an appealing photograph, develop and frame their own photos. Special adaptive equipment is available for persons in wheelchairs and small tripods are provided for students who have difficulty holding a camera steady, Winter said. Students will be transported to different locations in their communities to take photos and learn from local businesspeople whose work involves photography.

Hobbs, and classmate Steve Butler, said they enjoyed the visit to Drs. Foster & Smith where Winter said the class was able to watch a professional photo shoot for the pet supply company's famous catalog.

"They learned about how they get good pictures of the animals and they saw all of their photography equipment and (the studio) where they do their commercials," Winter said.

Butler and Hobbs said they also visited the Oneida County Courthouse and Nicolet Area Technical College during their photo-related outings.

"They take special pride in their work, they do in all of their work here," said Julie Bruyette, one of the photography instructors. "It's really neat because a lot of times they'll capture things we don't even see."

Winter said Headwaters decided to take the photography class on the road because staff understands there are people with disabilities living in surrounding communities who can't come to Rhinelander on a regular basis to take part in programming.

"While we do serve the whole tri-county area, and we have people coming in on vans, it's not always convenient for people to have to come all the way to Rhinelander so it makes more sense for us to do the class in the community where they live," she said, adding that Headwaters hopes to develop and share other programs in the community including cooking and geo-caching.

The photography class is the latest in a long line of programs Headwaters, a non-profit community-based, transitional work/rehabilitation center, has developed over the last 40 years to help Northwoods residents with disabilities achieve their fullest potential. Through the programs, Headwaters consumers learn work skills, earn a wage and build self-esteem.

Tour the sprawling Headwaters facility on Timber Drive and you will find people of all ages busy with projects. There is a simulated apartment for clients to learn life skills, an arts and crafts area, a physical fitness area, a computer lab and several production areas. In the production areas, Headwaters consumers make dog toys to be sold by Drs. Foster & Smith, sew prison uniforms, sort paperwork to be shredded and bag arrow feathers



Heather Schaefer/River News

Instructors Julie Bruyette and Ashley Kurtz, with former photography students David Hobbs and Steve Butler, will teach photography classes for people with intellectual challenges in Minocqua, Crandon and Eagle River.

for a company in Manitowish Waters. Headwaters also offers professional car detailing services (all work is done by consumers) and has a contract to maintain waysides in Oneida, Vilas, Lincoln and Forest counties.

"Some participants are here full-time five days a week, some here are just on a part-time schedule and then depending on what their desires and needs are, as well as what their families are hoping for them, they may work part of the time and participate in our day services program part of the time as well," said Deanna Barlow, production supervisor.

While a number of Headwaters consumers work in the in-house production areas, consumers are also placed in workplaces in the community. According to Katherine Garrison, community employment manager, Headwaters consumers are working at Goodwill, Burger King, Trig's and several other local businesses.

"Our people are going out and are committed to getting into the community," Garrison said.

Headwaters director Mary Hardtke said the organization has just celebrated another major milestone. A group of students with intellectual challenges are enrolled at Nicolet Area Technical College in a "soft skills employment" class where they will learn about employers' expectations for workplace behavior, work ethic and professionalism.

"This is the first course that has been established for people with intellectual disabilities," said Hardtke, adding that Headwaters was involved in developing the curriculum. "This is big. To have people with intellectual challenges go to college is just fantastic."

The Nicolet course will open even more doors for Headwaters clients, Hardtke added.

"They get a certification, some internships, and when they go out to get jobs they will have something (that says) we are trained, we are competent," she said.

For more information about the photography class, or to apply, contact Winter at (715) 369-1337.

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