

Cleo Tyler

Carmela Ginsberg, BBS' Director of Administration, fondly recalls how Cleo was always attuned to the colors people wore and would point out if coworkers were dressed in like colors or patterns – a detail overlooked by most. Cleo's responsibilities expanded over the years, but he was primarily in charge of kitchen duties, making and setting up coffee stations, delivering packages and internal messages and helping out wherever he could.

"Cleo provided a personal touch to everything he did," says Carmela Ginsberg.

For Sheril Grace Ball, Cleo is definitely a people person. It was his warmth and good nature that made it easy for Grace, who goes by her middle name, and her husband Steven to open up their home in Morton to Cleo two years ago through CI's Lifesharing program. Grace is a CI Community Support Associate (CSA) and has been working with Cleo for almost 10 years.

"Right now, Cleo is adjusting to his new life as a retiree, and like most retirees he's establishing new routines," says Grace. "It's been important to encourage him to go for a walk every day, and to keep active and social. He visits his girlfriend Beverly and friends Carol and Bud on the weekend and goes to church regularly. On Sundays I cook a big dinner and Cleo helps with the cleaning up."

Cleo is looking forward to more travel now that he's retired. Ball family vacations have taken him to Jamaica, where Grace was born, to Florida and on annual summer camping trips.

Meanwhile, the folks at BBS can now eagerly look forward to happy visits from Cleo, while his replacement at the firm, CI consumer, Andrew Bradell, fills in some pretty big shoes.



Staff at Bennett, Bricklin & Saltzburg gather with Cleo for his retirement party. From left, Geoff Peterson, Cleo, Jim Blumenthal, Carmen DiGenio, Carmela Ginsburg and Charles Lanzalotti.

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In Memoriam: Veterans of Life

Within two months of each other, CI consumers, Wesley Steizer and Paul Lukens Kautfman, died this past April and June respectively. The two men had been happily sharing their CI house in Secane, Pa., for 23 years.

"They had a good life here," says CI Community Support Associate, Janene Bowman. "They were well taken care of and very much loved and they knew it and would show us with a hug or a gentle touch."

Even though Wesley lived with severe arthritis and was deaf and blind, he had a great disposition and was in excellent health, living to the ripe old age of 90. He was independent enough to navigate his way around the house, and up until his death, managed to shave, brush his teeth, feed himself and even button up his shirt.

Paul, 80, arrived at Whitney Road House in 1977, 10 years before Wesley. He had a mischievous streak, and loved listening to music and humming Christmas songs. He was very patriotic and enjoyed visiting Veteran's Memorial Park and raising and lowering the flag outside the house.

Through the many severe challenges they faced in life, and with the help and support they received, Paul and Wesley soldiered on, and CI bids them a loving farewell.

740 South Chester Road
Swarthmore, PA 19081
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www.communityinteractions.org

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Celebrating Cleo



Celebrating Cleo are from left, CI Special Projects Manager, Meg Nielson, BBS' Managing Attorney, Louis Bricklin, Cleo Tyler, Paul Lantieri of BBS, and CI Community Support Associate, Grace Ball.

The law firm of Bennett, Bricklin & Saltzburg LLC (BBS), in Center City Philadelphia, recently threw a retirement party for one of its long standing employees, Cleo Tyler. Colleagues and friends gathered to celebrate the career of the man, who, as one of the partners, Charles Lanzalotti, described, "is somebody everyone looked forward to seeing." Cleo worked at BBS as a housekeeping assistant for two decades – a notable achievement for anybody, but especially for someone like Cleo, who has intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Cleo, who celebrated his 60th birthday on August 22, says that what he misses most about working at BBS are the people. "I miss saying good morning to everybody."

If there is anyone at BBS who can vouch for Cleo's conviviality, it is Charles Lanzalotti. He began working at BBS two years before Cleo in the mailroom of the firm and, in January of this year, made partner.

"Cleo became more than a just a member of our staff, he became part of the fabric of the place. He is very dependable and personable. He has a big heart and was always outgoing and good natured... and we miss him."

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Our Mission:

Community Interactions, Inc. (CI), provides quality services for people with intellectual, physical and behavioral health challenges to help them create lifestyles consistent with their communities while respecting individual choice, self – determination and culture.



Message from the CEO

Robyn Zippilli
Chief Executive Officer

Twenty years ago, around the same time the American Disabilities Act was signed into law, the Center City law firm of Bennett, Bricklin & Saltzburg took the inspired step of hiring CI consumer Cleo Tyler, whose story is celebrated in this issue of *Connections*. Over the years, more and more people with disabilities are finding meaningful employment in the community, as more individualized supports are in place to assist the employer and employee make the transition, and society changes its perceptions about hiring people with special needs. But that change is slow and continues to be a challenge. What the law firm did, was care enough about Cleo to give him a chance. In this issue of *Connections* we are happy to share with you stories that exemplify the principle of caring that is at the heart of who we are at CI, and what we do couldn't all be done without the care and support we receive from everyone "connected" with CI.

The services we provide our consumers are annually threatened by cuts to state budgets and without proper funding, staff and support, people like Cleo wouldn't have the opportunity to live and work in the community and lead a fulfilling life surrounded by friends and family. As an organization, we are trying to be proactive in ensuring that the services for our folks stay intact. To that end, some of the things we are working on include enhancing our website to enable secure and easy donations through PayPal, creating an online store, and organizing fundraising events like our annual Signature Event. As part of a holiday appeal, we are, for the first time, including an envelope in this issue of *Connections* that we hope you might send back with your generous support.

I know these stories will inspire you as they do me and CI staff every day. We truly appreciate all your caring support that helps us continue to enrich the lives of the people we serve. I wish you all a very blessed holiday season.

PEOPLE

Self-Advocate Melanie Yoho



Melanie Yoho inspires people every day. Born with spina bifida, Melanie, 45, has not been able to walk since she was five, when her crutches and braces were replaced by a wheelchair. A self-advocate and CI's president of Self-Advocates, Melanie was recently asked to

participate in a legislative breakfast organized by the MAX Association (Moving Agencies Toward Excellence), a member association of human service agencies in Southeastern Pennsylvania. In a galvanizing address, Melanie spoke of how the economy is negatively affecting staff through job cuts and what that means to consumers and their sense of empowerment. Without the help of the dedicated men and women employed by organizations like CI, people with disabilities would not be able to enjoy the kinds of freedoms and independence that many human service advocates and consumers themselves have worked so hard to attain.

For the past 12 years, Melanie has been promoting and practicing self-advocacy. Of the 15 years that she has been with CI, she has spent 11 of them working part-time as a receptionist at the front desk.

Safety First: Wayne Jeffrey



If you've been to CI's headquarters and Resource Center in Swarthmore, it is more than likely that you've met Wayne Jeffrey, or at least seen him in action – guiding traffic through CI's parking lot, assisting consumers in and out of the building and, in general, taking his job very seriously.

"Wayne really loves his job and is very conscientious," says Borsu Jallah, a CI

Team Leader – Program Specialist who works with Wayne. "Some people misunderstand him and think he takes his role as CI's Parking and Safety Attendant almost too seriously, but Wayne is only looking out for everybody's safety in the lot. He cares about people."

A resident in one of CI's community homes, Wayne, 26, has been with CI for almost two years. His first association with the organization was as a board member. Ms. Jallah describes Wayne as very social and outgoing, who is admired by people. He loves being around family and friends.

Wayne looks forward to his job. You'll find him there every weekday, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., no fail. He even schedules his doctor's appointments around work so he won't miss a minute on the job. Next time you stop by CI, say hi and keep to the five-mile speed limit in the lot – you'll make his day.

NEWSMAKERS

CI Board Member Speaks Out on Delaware Budget Cuts to Human Services

Earlier this year, Bill Cook, host of WHY-TV's weekly program "First," was so moved after hearing an account of the struggles CI Board member, Sue Humphreys, has been through with her son, Scott, that he approached her to do an interview for a news story on what the proposed \$2.9 million cuts to Delaware's Division of Developmental Disabilities would mean to Scott and all CI consumers and 3,000 other people with disabilities who receive support in Delaware.

Sue has been a vocal opponent of the proposed budget cuts by Delaware Governor Jack Markell and has participated in several hearings with CI's CEO, Robyn Zippilli and CI staff. Sue does not know what she would do if Scott did not receive these services that CI provides.

Scott, 36, has Pica, the most common eating disorder in individuals with developmental disabilities, characterized by an appetite for indigestible materials. Over the years, Scott has had three surgeries to remove objects and repair damage from ingesting dangerous items – in 1998, he almost died from an intestinal obstruction. Because of the round-the-clock care that Scott receives from CI, he is living happily and safely in his home in Newark, supported by his one-on-one staff.



The Hi-Fidelity of Friendship

Not everyone was excited to welcome Kathryn McKinley into the CI family to begin her role as Director of Human Resources 15 months ago. In fact, she hadn't managed to get through her first day when consumer, Jim Barnes, 59, told her that he wanted her to go home.

"We had a rough start, Mr. Barnsey and I," said Kathy humorously. "He was upset and I was somebody new." Needless to say, Barnsey, as he is affectionately known, has become near and dear to Kathy's heart and they have become best of friends thanks in part to a dollar store transistor radio, which she presented to him on their second meeting.

Kathy learned very quickly that Jim loves radios and especially taking them apart. She also learned that she has to give him fair warning if she, or Kelly Sheridan, CI's Controller, whom Jim also adores, are ever going to be away the one day a week that he helps out in the office. Jim, who has an intellectual disability, lives in a CI community home in Morton, Pa., with four more of his favorite people, and has been participating in CI's Adult Day program for about 10 years.

In the little more than a year that Kathy has been at CI, Jim has become part of her family and recently helped Kathy celebrate her 50th birthday party with family and friends in Phoenixville, Pa. More fun events are planned and Kathy is hoping to throw Jim a 60th birthday bash next year.

"He is a joy and I have really taken to him," said Kathy. "I look forward to our monthly trip to the dollar store – something that costs so little, but brings so much excitement is priceless."



Spinning records at Kathy's 50th Birthday Party at Molly Maguire's from left, Jim "Barnsey" Barnes, the birthday girl, DJ Michael Johnson and Anthony Seals.

SPOTLIGHT ON:

Exceeding Expectations

"The difference between you and me..." William Turner once told a CI staff person, "is you're dealing with 52 cards and I'm dealing with 49 cards."

This past summer, CI consumers, William Turner and Bonnie Brown, were selected to participate in the storytelling project, "Bridging the Gap... One Story at a Time," hosted by Philadelphia Coordinated Health Care in collaboration with StoryCorps, the national oral history project. Their taped conversations will be archived at the Smithsonian and at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, and have a chance

to be aired on National Public Radio's Morning Edition (NPR). "Bridging the Gap..." stemmed from the public awareness efforts and funding by the Developmental Disabilities Council, Dual Diagnosis Services and Supports Grant.

William Turner's story is one of hope and independence.

William jumped at the opportunity to participate in StoryCorps. He discussed his feelings about leaving Norristown State Hospital, where he lived off and on for more than 20 years, and he talked about his goals now that he is, for the first time in his life, enjoying a freedom never before experienced and taking control of his life with the care and supports that he needs.

For the past 15 months CI has supported William, 39, who, having a dual diagnosis of an intellectual disability with a mental health illness, was institutionalized in one form or another since he was 12 years old, moving throughout the system to include various mental health institutions and prisons. Since he has been with CI, there have been no law enforcement involvement or psychiatric hospitalizations, he has gained part-time employment, reconnected with family members



"Here I am..." – William Turner at his home in Woodlyn, Pa.

and is becoming integrated into his neighborhood.

"He's a totally different person now than when he first came to CI," says Peggy Smith Glavin, CI's Vice President of Services. "He has far exceeded anyone's expectations of adapting and making strides in his new home."

William's quality of life has improved by being able to live in a less restrictive environment, and he understands the opportunity that he has

been afforded and is working hard to make the most of his new life; he has recently expressed that the staff and this opportunity at CI helped to "save his life" – he means this literally.