



Donka Digest

Winter 2013/2014 - Issue XLI

A New Year with New Possibilities!

Dear Donka friends and family, This New Year comes with exciting opportunities at Donka! We are excited to be the recipients of a 2014 Tellabs grant, in the amount of \$55,000, to expand our Train the Trainer program. More vocational trainers and healthcare workers will be better equipped to use computers to help the persons with disability with whom they work regain their independence. More university students preparing to be elementary and secondary teachers will learn how assistive technology can open new doors for their future students.

Assistive technology is not a one size fits all. Donka is beginning to open more doors of opportunity to students with autism, literacy difficulties and communication impairments in our training labs. As we welcome new students and new possibilities, we are also saying goodbye to two retiring board members who have been with Donka since the beginning. I have had the honor and pleasure of working with Joyce and Ron for the last 23 years and I wish them all the best.

We will continue to do our "work" and reach for greater possibilities in the vision and work of our founder Don Van Havenen and dedicated board members like Joyce Van Der Molen and Ron Reinecke. We look forward to a new year and to share our news with you.

Happy New Year!
Leanne Stavenger-Vos
Executive Director

A Voice Can Be a Powerful Thing

Donka student and DuPage Convalescent Center resident Jim Urhausen owned a successful homebuilders and development company for over 35 years when complications from diabetes caused him to lose his legs and the use of his hands and arms. Faced with such a dramatic lifestyle change, Jim began to look around for new opportunities to regain his independence. Although his working days were behind him, Jim decided to expand his rudimentary computer knowledge. Due to the limited mobility of his hands and arms, Jim needed assistive technology that was hands-free. Donka's instructors trained him on Dragon NaturallySpeaking™ and now he can "type" faster than most able-bodied adults!

Dragon NaturallySpeaking™ is speech recognition software that makes completing computer tasks faster and easier for those who have limited physical mobility or limited learning disabilities. It is a great option for high school or college students to use to write papers, take class notes or keep in touch with social media. Students who are on the employment track at Donka find Dragon helpful compose documents, complete spreadsheets or navigate the internet and write emails. Donka students find that using their voice to navigate the computer removes the frustration that comes with slow typing skills and/or inability to use a keyboard or mouse.



Donka graduate Jim demonstrates the functions of voice recognition software

Jim demonstrates his Dragon skills to visitors to the lab by using voice command to open Internet browsers and Word documents. As he composes a document, he uses phrases like "scratch that" to erase words and switches between programs with just a word. Jim graduated from Donka's computer program and now enjoys using his lab time to easily navigate the internet or write emails. "I'm extremely grateful to the donors and sponsors of the Donka Program," says Jim. "Upon completion of my coursework, I hope to become a volunteer for the program and 'pay it forward.'"

Donka is dedicated to using cutting-edge assistive technology to give our students competitive skills to achieve employment and/or make everyday tasks easier and more efficient.

Also in this issue:

*DPCC: Donka's Home and Family
Interview with retiring Board Members
Donka Intern Learns Valuable Lessons*

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Donka's Mission

Changing lives of persons with disabilities through technology.

Donka's Vision

Donka is the premier provider of services that create personal empowerment, socialization, self-advocacy and job readiness for people with physical and visual impairment, through state of the art technology.

The DPCC: Donka's Home and Family

It started with an amazing vision and one computer.

Don Van Haveren knew that computer training could change the lives of the residents of the DuPage Convalescent Center (DPCC) but it could only work if they were given a space that was easily accessible. He enlisted the help of his friend and DPCC administrator, Ron Reinecke. Ron provided Don with a room close to his office and in it they set up a single computer.

Something special was happening in that small computer room. Residents were given a space where they could regain their independence, reconnect with family and friends, and realize that despite their physical, visual or learning limitations, they could receive job-training and be financially independent.

From its humble beginnings, Donka has expanded to meet the demand for our computer training services. In 1992, when plans for a new east wing of DPCC were in the works, Donka was reserved a larger space that would house more than 15 computers and ample space for instructors and administration to comfortably work towards Don's vision.

Being located in the same building as the residents means easy and consistent access to computers. "Donka has been an asset to the DuPage Convalescent Center Community for many years," says DPCC administrator Jennifer Ulmer. "Residents are able take classes and learn about the ever-



Donka computer lab has called DPCC home for more than 25 years.

changing world of technology, regardless of their physical challenges."

Ulmer believes that the availability of adaptive equipment and technology lifts the barriers residents often have on a daily basis. She continues to say that "Donka has been instrumental in helping us achieve our mission of helping our residents do as much as they can, as well as they can, for as long as they can."

The DuPage Convalescent Center is the only assisted living center in the Chicagoland area that has a fully equip computer lab that offers free computer training and open lab times to residents. From the day the first computer was switched on, the DuPage Convalescent Center has housed Donka rent-free. Logistically, this is a great blessing because Donka is able to maximize donations to go straight towards training programs to make them free for students. But more importantly, Donka and all who work here are truly part of a greater family with the nurses, therapists, administration and residents at DPCC.

With Donka Since the Start: Board Members Joyce and Ron Retire

During December 2013, Donka said good-bye to two retiring board members who have been with the organization since the very beginning. Joyce Van Der Molen and Ronald Reinecke both played instrumental roles in Donka's early development and without them, Donka would not be where it is today. We asked Joyce and Ron about their experiences with Donka.

How did you become board members at Donka?

Joyce: Don Van Haveren, a friend from Wheaton Christian Reformed Church, had recently formed an organization called Donka which offered computer training programs for people with disabilities. He asked me to serve on the Board. While I knew nothing about computers, Don's vision of how the use of a computer could change lives and his enthusiasm for this new venture were primarily the reason I wanted to be apart of this organization. I also visited the Donka Lab where I observed how he and instructor Judy Lampa created a culture of caring where students felt comfortable and were able to succeed.

Remember, 25 years ago, assistive technology was not readily available. When a Donka student needed adaptations made to their computer equipment, like a wand to control the mouse for example, Don would make the adjustments himself. This is what I mean when I say that he was a visionary. He saw things in people that others could not. He knew that, if given the chance



Joyce and Ron were both close friends with Donka's founder, Don Van Haveren

and the equipment, his students with disabilities could improve their lives.

Ron: Before Don Van Haveren asked me to act as a Donka board member, I was the DuPage Convalescent Center administrator. Don came to me with his vision of starting computer training for the residents at DPCC and I supplied him with a room by my office. It started with one computer and two students. The residents loved Don and we quickly saw how important Donka was for their lives.

What did you enjoy most about being a board member?

Joyce: There is really not one single moment. The sum of all the accomplishments achieved at Donka really made my time on the

board memorable and worthwhile. The grants that we receive are reaffirming. Our community and our loyal donors recognize that Donka's work is meaningful.

Ron: I enjoyed seeing the organization grow and provide activities for the residents. My proudest moment was when the DPCC opened the new east wing and Donka was able to provide more computer training opportunities for more residents.

What do you see in Donka's future?

Ron: I would like to see Donka continue the community training program with university students.

Joyce: I am excited to see the Train the Trainer program expand to reach more special education teachers and care-takers. I see Donka blossoming and reaching more people in our community who need their services. Leanne is a very able leader and she continues to promote the culture of working with the community to share Don's vision.

Donka owes so much to Joyce and Ron and we will truly miss them!. We wish them the best in their retirement!

Donka Raises more than \$7,000 at Annual Bowl-a-thon!

A special thanks to everyone who came out on October 27th, 2013. We had a blast!

Special thanks to our sponsors:

Jim Cook, West Chicago - \$1,000

Wheaton Bank & Trust - \$500

DuPage Workforce Board, Lisle, IL - \$250

Van Dyke Charitable Foundation - \$250

Chicago Far West Suburban Delta Gamma Alumnae - \$100

Mathieson, Moyski, Celer & Co., LLP Wheaton IL - \$100



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Intern Learns Lessons that Last a Lifetime

edge assistive technology and successful teaching methods that will prepare them for their future professions in the field of disability services or special education.

Donka was lucky to have an amazing intern this past fall. Jessica is a special education and elementary education double major at Trinity Christian College. She was very interested in the internship position because she was looking for work and an internship would provide her with a way to use what she had learned in school as well as learn more about assistive technology and helping people who have disabilities. "I absolutely enjoyed my time as an intern at Donka," says Jessica. "Everyone

who works there is friendly and was very patient with me as I learned about all the assistive technologies that they offer there. I especially enjoyed my time working one-on-one with students at Donka, and co-teaching the Benedictine night class. I feel much more prepared to be able to help a future student of mine who might need to use some of these types of technologies. I even found some neat tricks to use with the computer to help myself out in college!"

We at Donka wish Jessica the best! For more information about applying for an internship at Donka, visit our website or call us at 630-665-8169.

Jessica Bordenaro took home valuable experience as Donka's intern in Fall 2013

It takes a special person to dedicate their life to serving persons with disabilities. Everyone that works at Donka puts their heart and soul into their work, including our interns. Donka offers internships through a partnership with Trinity Christian College and other colleges in DuPage County. Interns shadow our instructors to learn about cutting-

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