

10-17-14

**To: Employment First stakeholders**

**From: Mike Maley, Statewide Employment First Coordinator**

**Re: Employment First: Butler Automotive Group**

(Please forward to your local partners & stakeholders)

It started with a lunch, and turned into a great business relationship.

Chuck and Linda Butler, founders of [Butler Automotive Group](#), attended fundraising lunches at Medford-based Living Opportunities for several years. [Living Opportunities](#) is a nonprofit organization that provides employment services, supported living services, a working art studio, and behavioral consultation services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families.



Curtis Hancock, parts and services director at Butler Hyundai, speaks with employee Matt May.  
Photo: Lightflies

In June 2013, Butler Hyundai of Medford hired Matt May, 36, to help keep the service area and parking lots tidy. Matt, who experiences Down syndrome, had worked at a variety of jobs over the years, including fast food and grocery stores. But he was unhappy in those

jobs, and felt frustrated at the lack of support. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) referred him to Living Opportunities, where he voiced his preference to work outside the food industry in a job that fit his interest in anything with wheels – he rides BMX bikes in his free time.

“Matt feels he is just one of the guys here,” said his mother, Elaine Schacher. “There is no feeling that he is different from anyone else. It’s the first job he’s had where it just fits.”

Since Matt was hired in 2013, the Butler Auto Group has hired four additional employees with developmental disabilities from its relationship with Living Opportunities (three work in Medford at Butler Hyundai and two others are employed at the Ashland dealership. Those employees include Brad Rutledge, who was hired for a very specific job –producing stickers for cars in the sale lot.



Brad Rutledge creates stickers for the cars on sale at Butler Hyundai in Medford.

Photo: Lightflies

Curtis Hancock, parts and service director for Butler Hyundai, said when a 20-hour per week job came up making stickers for cars on display, he went to the Living Opportunities to see if they could find an employee for the job.

“It’s four hours a day, and no one in service or sales has the time to work on that machine (that makes the stickers),” he said. “The machine is difficult to operate so I didn’t know if it was a long shot. But those stickers are essential for my business.”

Brad, who experiences a developmental disability, was hired for the job.

“Brad came into my office after his first day on the job, and boy, my stomach just sank,” Curtis said, laughing at the memory. “I thought, he hates the machine and he’s going to quit. And you know what he said to me? He said, ‘Curtis, you have the right guy for this job.’ It turns out, he loves stickers. They are one of his favorite things!”

In fact, Brad made a sticker that says, “Brad’s Bat Cave” which is displayed in his work area. He is now king of the sticker machine.

Steve Dawes, director of employment services at Living Opportunities, said Brad was looking to change jobs and preferred work in an office environment. Brad has his own work area at Butler Hyundai where he produces the car stickers, a methodical job that requires great attention to detail.

Curtis said businesses want a more diverse workforce, but often are worried about the responsibility of training employees with I/DD.

“The benefit to me is that I told Living Opportunities what I need done and how I need it done, and they work with the employees to make sure it gets done,” he said. “And having these guys on my team has just helped across the board. It has brought us all together.”

Curtis said the sales and service departments used to have more internal conflicts. Since hiring Matt, Ian and Brad at the Medford dealership. He said the entire workforce has unified due to the positive attitude and enthusiasm that the three men bring.

“It has united this team in ways I didn’t think was possible,” Curtis said. “Matt was in the hospital a while ago and he kept calling in. I got the sense he was worried he would lose his job because of his past experiences. And I told him, ‘Listen buddy, no one is replacing you. This is your job as long as you want it, no one else’s.’”

Matt is sometimes seen wearing his Butler uniform even outside of working hours.

Matt is a sports fan, and roots for the Green Bay Packers. Like many of the other guys at the auto dealership, he gets into talking sports and gently ribbing his coworkers about their favorite teams.

“I’m an NFL guy, 24/7,” Matt said. “Curtis, he likes college football but I’m NFL.”

Matt’s mother Elaine becomes tearful watching her son interact with his boss Curtis. She said to see her son successfully working in the community is a dream come true.

“When he was born in 1977, I wasn’t given a good outlook for his future,” she said, wiping away tears. “To see him with a place in the community, contributing... there aren’t words for it.”

Elaine said Matt is very independent, and she at first struggled when he made the decision to go to work.

“It was terrifying, honestly,” she said. “I was worried about how people would treat him. I knew it was what he wanted. He always wanted a regular life, like anyone else. When he moved out on his own, it was the same. I was worried he would be hurt or exploited, but it’s what he wanted.”

Matt later echoes his mother’s feelings. He said he wants, and deserves, a regular life.

“I need to work because I’m trying to make a living and support myself, just like my mom and my boss and everyone else here,” he said. “That’s what people do, and that’s what I do.”

Thank you all for your continued involvement, support, and advocacy for services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Oregon. If you have comments or other questions, please email them to [employment.first@state.or.us](mailto:employment.first@state.or.us).

~ Mike

A slideshow of Matt and Brad working at Butler Hyundai can be viewed at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dhsoregon/sets/72157646436512063/>