

“I Can Do That”

Mike Overman Honored For Decades Of Devotion

It’s hard to keep Mike Overman on the topic of himself, because he mainly likes to talk about the goodness of other people.

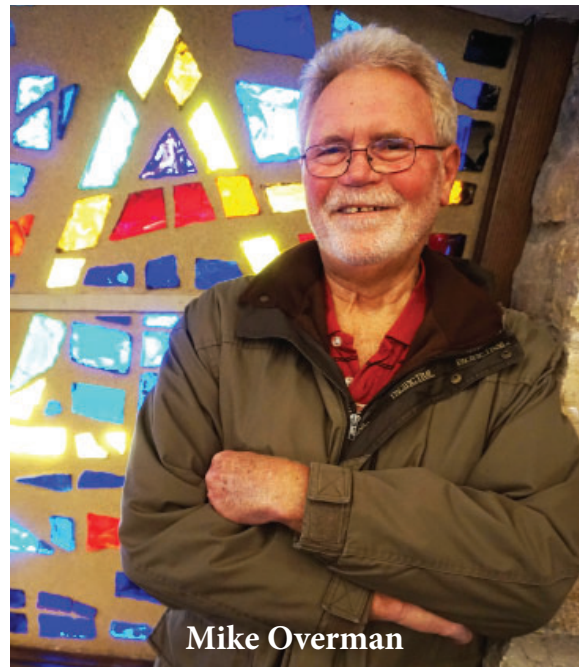
So bring up the Albert Heckler Award, which Mike received at Mercer DD’s annual staff recognition banquet on November 17, and Mike will talk about Albert Heckler, for whom the award is named.

“Albert was always, always in-

involved with the ARC and served on our board any number of times. He was good at giving of himself, and so when we (Cheryl Ann Programs at the time, and now the Mercer DD) decided to give an award to honor people for their many contributions, it was natural to name the award after Albert Heckler, and to give him the first one. That was one of the coolest things I ever got to do, was give Albert the first Albert Heckler Award.”

Mike was the superintendent of Cheryl Ann Programs at the time, a position he held for 33 years, until his retirement in 2015. The Albert Heckler Award is given annually to an individual who provides exemplary service to people with disabilities in Mercer County. It was never intended to recognize a staff member. But that’s okay, because always, Mike Overman was a staff member and a volunteer, and everything in between.

Here’s just one example. Years ago, parents confided in Mike that their young adults didn’t necessarily enjoy the three-day holiday weekends when Cheryl Ann shut down. They got bored and lonely, missing their friends. Working with ARC, and because Martin Luther King Jr. was a personal hero of his, Mike instituted ARC’s annual MLK weekend bingo game, stepped in as the caller and happily handed out prizes. It went



Mike Overman

over so well ARC still holds six such bingo events each year.

That was decades ago, and even in his retirement Mike is still at the helm, calling numbers and making corny jokes that the crowd expects. When he pulls B-8, for instance, he yells, “Oh, how I wish I had a . . .” and the crowd finishes his sentence, “B-8!” It’s a callback to a V8 commercial that some are probably too young to remember, but it doesn’t matter. Everybody laughs.

Mike seeks out folks who are lonely, and visits them. He has one friend whom he always takes to the harness races at the Mercer County Fair, because the friend’s dad did that with him until his dad died. Mike is a volunteer dad. There are two elderly gentlemen at his church, St. John Lutheran in Celina, whom Mike visits every Monday, one right
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THANK YOU, COUNTY VOTERS!

Voters in Mercer County overwhelmingly approved the renewal of a six-year, 2.42 mil levy that will give Mercer DD that represents a vital source of revenue for us to help individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.

The levy passed by a margin of 71–29 percent, and we are absolutely committed to upholding the trust and confidence that county residents have shown in us.

Thank you for your support and your faith in us to provide innovative, effective programming that enhances the lives of the people we serve.

We Can't Say Thank You Enough!

November's holiday is Thanksgiving so the appropriate thing for me to say is:

Thank you, Mike Overman.

Your leadership and service to the families of Mercer County can never be emphasized enough. You have served the Mercer DD community in six consecutive decades—as a teacher, as a superintendent, and now as a



Mercer DD Superintendent Shawn Thieman

volunteer. Your commitment and passion for the people we serve is unmatched and presenting you with the 2022 Albert Heckler Award was something that I will always remember.

Thank you, Mercer DD staff.

Your hard work is never appreciated enough. It is an honor to lead such an experienced and respected group of professionals. At this year's awards banquet, we recognized employees reaching the milestones of 5, 15, 20 and 40 years of service. In total, the 32 employees at Mercer DD have worked here for over 363 years!!!

Thank you, Mercer County.

Your support and dedication to local individuals with developmental disabilities is inspiring. Our six-year levy renewal was on the ballot November 8 and it passed overwhelmingly. It is quite obvious that the people in Mercer County feel a commitment to the people we serve. I have overseen three levy renewal campaigns since becoming superintendent—I can't even express the joy and humility I feel when the results come in. I am very proud to be from this community.

Happy Thanksgiving and have a blessed Christmas Season.

Thank you to our amazing staff!



Our staff makes us smile! They work hard to serve individuals and their families. Mercer DD was happy to host its annual Staff Appreciation Dinner on November 17.

Among those honored were:

- Gregg Rutledge and Kelli Thomas for 20 years of service (top left, with Shawn Thieman).
- Kathy Coon for 10 years of service, and Claire Loughridge, for 15 years of service (top right, with Shawn).
- Laura Yoder for five years of service (at right).



Mike Overman Honored

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before lunch, and one after. Mike is a volunteer son.

Old folks, middle-aged folks, young adults, kids. Mike sees human needs, and tries to fill them with his human self. He's looking forward to December 8 when he gets to be the sensitive Santa at Mercer DD for children who won't approach a Santa who is too loud or too jolly. Mike has a quiet, gentle way of welcoming them, which the kids appreciate.

Being the sensitive Santa is "one of the highlights of my life," Mike said. "I felt so moved by those kids, who kind of warmed up and came closer. The organizers asked me to be slow-moving and calm, and I said, 'I can do that.'"

Mike was born in Maria Stein to parents who volunteered, who went above and beyond as part of their normal lives. His parents' example is bound up in his mind with the lessons he has learned in church throughout his life. "The things in

religion that stick with me more are 'love your neighbor,' help those in need. God wants you to do that. So I say, 'Okay, I can do that.'"

"Okay, I can do that." It's what Mike said shortly after his first visit to Cheryl Ann School in 1974. He had graduated from Bowling Green State University and had been in a high school classroom as a student teacher, and he had not liked it at all. "The kids didn't seem to care, and I lost interest in it," he said.

He worked in a factory for a couple of years before he decided to try again, this time as an elementary school teacher. He went back to school at Wright State University Lake Campus, where he had to observe classes with younger students. Someone suggested he also spend time at the Cheryl Ann School, and when he did, something that had long been waiting inside him clicked into place.

"I started going there on Fridays, and it was a ball," he said. "I fell in love with it. I liked the kids; they had an eagerness to learn. Sure, there were behavioral problems, but we knew we could deal with that."

He was hired as a teacher at Cheryl Ann the next year, 1975. By July 1982, he was named Cheryl Ann's superintendent. There was never any talk from him about a 40-hour week, a concept that in his mind simply did not apply. His work with and for people with developmental disabilities and their families "felt like what I was supposed to be doing."

He never doubted, even in those early years, that he would find a way to help the world. Or to



Mike Overman holds the Albert Heckler Award, with son Max and wife Rhonda.

help one person, which to him is one and the same. He just had to give his destiny the chance to present itself. "I really believe, you have to be patient, but you also have to be prepared. Just wait," Mike said, "and when an opportunity arrives, it will feel like it was made for you."

Mike had the opportunity to build Mercer DD into a program recognized around the state for its innovative programming and dedicated people. He had the opportunity to place the Albert Heckler Award into the hands of Albert Heckler himself. He had the opportunity to help others. It was all he's ever wanted to do.

"Mike always has had a passion for the people we serve, and their families" said Shawn Thieman, who is the current superintendent of Mercer DD, and who considers Mike his mentor. "To him, it's a higher calling."

Shawn had the opportunity to place the award into Mike's hands.

"It was cool that I could give that award to Mike. It was a way to show my appreciation," he said. And a way to say to Mike, we saw what you did for all those years, and what you continue to do. We see you loving your neighbor.

Mercer DD's Albert Heckler Award Recipients

- 2006 - Albert Heckler
- 2007 - Donald "Duke" Brunswick
- 2008 - Mary Siefring
- 2009 - Louis and Dorothy Hoying
- 2010 - Roger Sudhoff
- 2011 - Marcellus "Marce" Nietfeld
- 2012 - Diane and Tim Menchhofer
- 2013 - Warren Menchhofer
- 2014 - Ruth Weidman
- 2015 - Paula Byers
- 2016 - Rick and Sheri Mosier
- 2017 - Boyd Granger
- 2018 - Ruth Kremer
- 2019 - Pat and Cathy Schmitmeyer
- 2020 - Jan Tindall
- 2021 - Darl Strable

Forty Fantastic Years!



At our Staff Appreciation Dinner on November 17, we honored Chris Schulte, center, for a remarkable 40 years of service with Mercer DD. Chris is an early intervention specialist and has helped so many children and their families get off to the best possible start in life.

In recognizing Chris, Mercer DD Superintendent Shawn Thieman (right) said that she had the most years of service of any Mercer DD employee, ever! that includes former Mercer DD Superintendent Mike Overman, left, with 39.5 years.

Congratulations, Chris Schulte!

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