

Pony Pages



Fall/Winter 2022

Celebrating Success!

Also featured:

- **Pony Bird's Big Announcement**
- **15th Annual Great Taste Information ...and more!**





Letter from the President & CEO

Dear Friends,

We have some exciting news to share. As you know, Pony Bird and NextStep for Life are considered industry leaders in providing comprehensive, quality-driven services for individuals with physical, intellectual, developmental, and other disabilities. For more than 40 years we have collaborated and partnered to ensure every person with disabilities receives the support they need. We prioritize people and work to empower individuals by promoting independence, opportunities, and, most importantly, choice.

We know how important it is that the services we provide continue for the individuals and families we work alongside and support. Over the past 18 months Pony Bird's and NextStep for Life's Boards of Directors have explored a strategic partnership. We have been monitoring possible funding shifts and changing trends in our industry. These changes require us to be proactive in adapting our service delivery. Additionally, the ongoing workforce crisis encouraged us to explore opportunities that would strengthen our mission, create efficiencies in the ways we operate, and diversify the programs we offer. To accomplish all of this, Pony Bird and NextStep for Life are joining forces! The two organizations will be formally merging as of June 30, 2022.

Together, we are better, stronger, and more equipped to face the challenges and changes ahead. Together, we broaden our scope of services to the community and increase our sustainability. Together, we can continue to address the workforce crisis with combined resources to ensure we are able to retain and recruit a quality workforce. Together, we create a continuum of support that does not otherwise exist in our community. Together, we will strengthen support for individuals with disabilities across their lifespan.

You are an integral part of this process. Your support and partnership is incredibly important as we transition. Full integration will likely take 18-24 months. In the meantime, we will continue to keep you updated. We welcome your questions and feedback. The enclosed document will provide contact information and the link to a website where many of your questions may be answered.

We are grateful you are here with us. We are grateful for our partnership. The journey ahead is a journey we will take together because together, we are simply better.



In partnership,
Sara Sucharski,
President & CEO

**“
Together, we create a
continuum of support
that does not otherwise
exist in our community.”**



Pony Bird, Inc. and NextStep for Life Merge to Create a Strong Continuum of Support

On February 9, Pony Bird and NextStep for Life announced our plans to merge into one organization. It's exciting news! This merger will create a continuum of support for individuals with intellectual, physical, developmental, and other disabilities that does not otherwise exist in the community.

The merger also drives opportunities to improve service delivery, diversify programs, and addresses needs of growth with the development of more resources for individuals and families in the community. Simply put – we are better, stronger, and will have more impact in the region for individuals with disabilities and their families. The workforce crisis and potential shifts at the State and Federal levels compelled organizational leadership to proactively address the challenges and possible changes.

Our Board of Directors

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Charles Wooten

Treasurer
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Donna L. Litton

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Susan Curfman
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Roy Burnside
Kyle Drury
Dana Hockensmith
Heather Williams

Cover photo: Pony Bird individual, Gary, celebrates his graduation from Neuwoebner High School with a member of their staff.



Through this merger, the new Pony Bird, Inc. will be able to provide more resources and a greater scope of services for the community by creating operating efficiencies that allow staff to more effectively maintain the high-quality services for which we are known. The new Pony Bird, Inc. will be able to more effectively aid an individual of any age with disabilities across their lifespan and with person-centered services that will meet their needs.

Regarding the merger, Jennifer Wooldridge shared, "Serving people with disabilities has been my passion for over 40 years. I have been part of this ever-changing landscape of service delivery professionally, financially, and socially. I know that there is power in numbers and partnering with an organization with the same desire to deliver quality-driven services will make a meaningful difference for both those served and for the region as a whole. As I move into retirement, I embrace this new entity as a valuable organization for all stakeholders."

We are so grateful to have you here with us. HERE'S TO OUR EXCITING NEW FUTURE!

Sara Sucharski adds, "We are fully engaged and excited for the opportunity to redefine and strengthen service delivery in our region. We will provide a true continuum of support that is led by a multidisciplinary team with experience, commitment, and passion to ensure individuals in our communities may access quality-driven services. The combined knowledge of the teams and the commitment they provide to the individuals we serve are truly the benchmark in the industry. The merger allows us to achieve our goals with greater regional impact while creating efficiencies and sustainability as regulations and funding models adapt on the state and federal level.

We have retained the name Pony Bird, Inc. for the new organization, but are exploring opportunities to include the name NextStep for Life in some other way. Pony Bird will continue to be led by Sara Sucharski, President & CEO, and allows for the planned retirement of Jennifer Wooldridge, the current CEO of NextStep for Life. The merger will be finalized June 30, 2022, and we expect full integration will take 18-24 months.

For more information about the new Pony Bird, Inc. or the merger, please visit www.ponybird.org/nextstep or contact Sara Sucharski by phone at 636-931-5818 or by email at merger@ponybird.org.



ON MISSION

Strength and Support

Partners in Strengthening our Mission

You've just read the exciting news that Pony Bird and NextStep for Life are joining forces! To support the success of implementation and integration, various community partners have stepped up to support this effort by offsetting technology, communications, and other associated expenses! **Pony Bird leadership is proud of our community partnerships** and grateful for the confidence of the following supporters:

Jefferson Foundation

\$100,000



\$50,000



\$17,500

Partners in Quality-Driven Services

Last year Pony Bird joined United Way's safety network of support. Each year, the United Way hosts a campaign to raise funds for distribution to participating organizations. This year, we are excited to announce that United Way exceeded their goals and **helped us achieve an increase** in our annual gift. Giving more than \$100,000 this year, the United Way ensures critical access to medical supports in our community living programs for individuals with

Proud partner of



Greater St. Louis

intellectual, physical, and developmental disabilities who are non-ambulatory and medically fragile.

Partners in Support

Pony Bird staff and individuals are grateful for a donation that makes all the difference! Recently, Gail and David Wilshek and Ronnie Hermann both **donated a washer and dryer set** for our Day Services and the Drury home.

These gifts ensure the individuals who participate in Community Living and Day Services stay clean and healthy as they **achieve their best possible lives!**



You have probably heard that Missouri (along with the rest of the nation) is facing a critical workforce crisis for people who provide support and care for individuals with disabilities. Pony Bird remains committed to advocating for legislation and policies that positively impact our ability to maintain the quality-driven services for which we are known and a network of support for individuals with disabilities.

In alignment with this commitment, Pony Bird President & CEO, Sara Sucharski, met with the House Appropriations Health and Mental Health committee, alongside other MARF members, to advocate for providers caught in the current, critical workforce crisis. A central concern continues to be that individuals must be able to remain in their current, supportive environments, but ongoing staff shortages puts these individuals at risk. Sufficient funding to empower providers, like Pony Bird, to improve recruitment and retention packages is essential.

To read more about the workforce crisis and its impact on Pony Bird and other providers visit: <https://www.kcur.org/news/2022-01-13/missouri-and-kansas-face-workforce-crisis-of-workers-who-care-for-people-with-disabilities>



continue on page 5



It's not a minimum wage job and yet our industry is competing with other minimum wage employers.

Contact Jennifer Adams at 636-931-5818 or by email at jadams@ponybird.org if you are interested in joining our Advocacy Committee or would like to continue following stories like this.

Governor Parson Prioritizes Workforce Development

Governor Parson outlined his 2022 legislative priorities and the blueprint of his Fiscal Year 2023 Budget recommendations during the Annual State of the State Address. Parson encouraged the continuation of his foundational priorities of workforce development and infrastructure which includes a proposed increase to a \$15/hour level for all I/DD workers.



This proposal is being offered as the starting point for a lengthy legislative budget process. It is critical that advocates continue to educate their elected officials about why this proposed investment is critical to support the people we serve. Without sufficient funding, providers like Pony Bird will continue to struggle navigating the workforce crisis.



Leaving a Legacy

Pony Bird is pleased to showcase an individual who, humbly and generously, created a lasting legacy for individuals with significant disabilities at Pony Bird.

More than 15 years ago, Paul Miller was introduced to Pony Bird by a long-time friend of the organization and parent, Cliff Zell. That initial visit captured his heart, and Pony Bird's mission stayed with him through the years. When a new home in DeSoto was built, Paul and Cliff volunteered their time helping to landscape the surrounding area to ensure the home was beautiful and enriching for the individuals who live there.



Sadly, on October 15, Paul passed away following a two-year battle with cancer. During his life he was a **man of many talents**. He was a controller for various St. Louis region companies and the co-owner of an apartment complex in St. Charles. In his spare time, he was a Dodgers fan but followed the Cardinals

too. He loved cars, specifically the Mustang. Most importantly, he lived generously - helping anyone who needed it and rarely accepting credit. Paul's friends considered him family, fondly calling him "Uncle Paul." He enjoyed spending time with his godson and friends and didn't miss an event for any of the kids. Upon his passing, he left gifts to both friends and family alike. He lived and gave fully.

In 2020, Paul reached out to Pony Bird to discuss his estate plans. He stated that he wanted to do something for the individuals who lived there and instructed Pony Bird to create **a lasting gift** through Pony Bird's endowment. The endowment empowers donors to strengthen their impact over time in ways that one-time donations cannot. This year, Pony Bird was astonished to learn that Paul had left more than \$150,000 to Pony Bird. With his generosity, individuals with significant intellectual, physical, and developmental disabilities will receive the supports and services they need to achieve their best possible lives.

But the story does not end there. The legacy of connection Paul created continued when Paul's sister, Paula Dunlavy (pictured above), came to visit Pony Bird for the first time. She spent time with the individuals Paul had grown to love and learned more about the services Pony Bird provides. **We are grateful to Paul** for his generosity and grateful to Paula for continuing his legacy of connection.



Paul Miller and his sister, Paula Dunlavy.

Pony Bird's 15th Annual Great Taste

Saturday, March 26, 2022

Arnold Eagle's Club, 1725 Jeffco Blvd, Arnold, MO 63010
6:00 – 9:30 pm



Taste Club Card & Sponsorship Opportunities Available at
<https://TASTE2022.givesmart.com>

Pony Bird's 15th Annual Great Taste is **SOLD OUT!**

In-person tickets are sold out, but there are still ways you can support Pony Bird with Sponsorships, Program Advertising and the popular TASTE CLUB CARD. Restaurants participating in this years card are: *McAlister's Deli, The Pasta House Co., Weber's Front Row, Case & Bucks Grub and Pub, Dylan's Sports Pub & Grill, Penn Station East Coast Subs, Main & Mill Brewing Company, The Blue Owl Restaurant & Bakery, Krabby Daddy's Seafood Eatery, Cool Beans Cafe, Frankie Gianino's, Russell House Restaurant Inn & Brewery, The Dough Depot, Trattoria Giuseppe and Pretzel Boy's*



If you would like to be a sponsor, purchase program advertising, a Taste Club Card or make a donation please complete this form and mail to Pony Bird, Inc. by **February 28, 2022.**

Program Advertising

Help support Pony Bird's Great Taste 2022 and your organization with an ad in our program! Please check the appropriate ad size:

- \$400 Full Page Ad (7.5" x 10")
- \$200 Half Page Ad/Horizontal (7.5" x 4.5")
- \$200 Half Page Ad/Vertical (3.75" x 10")
- \$150 Quarter Page Ad (3.75" x 5")
- \$75 Business Card Ad (3.5" x 2")

Sponsor Advertiser Both

Contact Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Email _____
 Cell phone (required) _____

Payment type: Check (enclosed) Credit

- The finished program size will be 8.5" x 11"
- Please provide finished, camera-ready artwork for your ad – attach artwork or email to tkoenen@ponybird.org
- Payment is due with this form by **February 28, 2022** to:
 Pony Bird, Inc., Attn: Taste
 P. O. Box 190
 Mapaville, MO 63065

Sponsorship/Taste Club Card Form

(No deadline for Taste Club Cards purchase.)

- \$5,000 Presenting Sponsor
- \$2,000 Platinum Sponsor
- \$1,000 Gold Sponsor
- \$500 Silver Sponsor
- \$250 Bronze Sponsor
- \$30 per Taste Club Card Qty. _____
- I would like to make a donation.

TOTAL Amount \$ _____

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Email _____
 Cell phone (required) _____
 Payment type: Check (enclosed)
 Credit (complete below) MC Discover VISA
 Card No _____
 Name on card (if different than above) _____
 Exp. ____ / ____ / ____ 3 digit security code _____
 Billing Zip Code (if different than above) _____
 Signature _____

Volunteers and Section Leaders are needed for this event. Contact Kelly Feldmann at 636.931.5818 or email kfeldmann@ponybird.org with question or to help!

6 Please note in the event of a cancellation: If the ticket holder/sponsor does not request a refund the ticket/sponsorship will be considered a 100% donation to Pony Bird, Inc.

Pony Bird Supporters

Fall/Winter Donations

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Pony Bird, Inc.
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Pony Bird inc.
 is Proud to be a leader in
 care for individuals with
 significant intellectual and
 physical disabilities.

#1 in providing non-ambulatory care!

