

Advocating **INDEPENDENCE**



*Gem State Developmental Center has been helping
the developmentally disabled for 30 years.*



By L.M. Florenzen
Photos by Hayley Langa

“It is necessary to help others, not only in our prayers, but in our daily lives. If we find we cannot help others, the least we can do is to desist from harming them.”

Though these words were spoken by the Dalai Lama, they might as well be the mission statement at Gem State Developmental Center.

Founder Martin Landholm discovered early in his career there were no voices speaking on behalf of those with behavior and developmental disabilities, so he set out to make noise for them. Working with the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare back in the 1970s, Landholm created and implemented some of the state's first programs and intermediate care facilities. He did not come from parents who had developmental disabilities, nor did Landholm personally struggle with an issue. But he saw the need for those who did to be treated fairly, and respectfully, instead of like second class citizens. After more than a decade working with the state, he and wife Rosalie decided it was time to run their own program, and Gem State Developmental Center was launched in 1983.

From 1983 to 1985, Gem State was the only private facility offering services in Idaho. As such, it became the maverick organization which many other programs would imitate. Operating solely on funds from Medicaid makes running the facility challenging, but being surrounded by the most dedicated, talented and compassionate individuals makes the vision clearer.



A FEW FACTS ABOUT GEM STATE DEVELOPMENTAL CENTER

- Founded in 1983.
- Developed Idaho's first and only association for developmental development facilities.
- First summer program launched in 1993.
- In 1999, implemented after school programs for children.
- Celebrated 30 years in business in 2013.



Cory Makizuru was a former resident of Hawaii, who landed in Idaho to study Chemical Engineering at the College of Western Idaho in Caldwell. After a volunteering stint at a community center for latchkey kids, Cory was hooked on helping children. Spending one summer volunteering in nine different human services organizations, he discovered his calling was with children with developmental disabilities. He answered an ad for a position at Gem State, and 30 years later he serves as the Administrator.

You might think three decades working with people whose struggles range from eating disorders, behavioral and learning problems, drug, physical and mental abuse might make someone jaded, but Makizuru is eloquently grounded. "We're not going to cure someone with Downs or Prader-Willi Syndrome, but we'll give them skills to know they have value," he says. Some of these skills include managing money, finding work, learning to live independently, being leaders, and giving back to their community.

On staff at the center is a clinical supervisor, Lori-Jo Poole, and a social worker, Susan Hill; both of whom have been at Gem State over 15 years. What they do is not a job for the faint-hearted, or people looking to get wealthy. You might think one might be bitter or crazy doing this work, but these women are anything but. Courageous, concerned and classy are words which come to mind.

Hill began in Domestic Violence, and soon knew children with developmental needs weren't getting what they needed in school, so she turned her focus. "You get so much from them," Susan says. "You might look terrible, but one will come up to you and tell you how beautiful you look. That unconditional love makes your day."

Poole, a former farm girl who had a mother in law enforcement, comments, "It keeps you humble. These are reminders of simple things we take for granted." To say they work hard is nothing, but to show the fruits of their labor, in one particular young man, is priceless.

Dylan Jenkins was in the foster care system at an early age, and to say he had a lot to overcome is an understatement. To look and speak with him now, at 20, one would never guess he had serious behavioral issues. Poole and Hill look upon Jenkins with a subdued beaming of tired parents, who are proud of their son, and the battles overcome. Today, Jenkins looks forward to weekend visits with his family, going on excursions at Gem State, and to one day working at Chuck E. Cheese.

Gem State Developmental Center is four locations strong, with adult/child programs in Meridian and Nampa, including after school and summer programs. Just celebrating their 30 years in the industry is an amazing milestone. Jenkins says "I like the staff. They're really cool and they try to make everything comfortable."

That's the sign of a first class organization. **ML**



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GEM STATE ADMINISTRATOR CORY MAKIZURU

