

FALL 2025

CONTACT

In touch with all things Cottonwood.



COTTONWOOD
INCORPORATED

We help individuals with disabilities shape their own future.

A Message from Our CEO



As I sit down to write this column, I find myself reflecting on the many moments—big and small—that have shaped our journey since the last update. Cottonwood is more than an organization; it is a community built on compassion, resilience, and the unwavering focus on our mission of helping people with disabilities shape their own future. Over the past few months, we have celebrated milestones, welcomed new faces, and deepened our commitment to those we support. Whether it was a successful event like Salute! 2025, new partnerships in both Cottonwood Industries and CORE, or a quiet victory in someone's personal growth, each story is a reminder of why we do this work. This issue of the Contact provides a snapshot of our shared progress. It's filled with updates, celebrations, and heartfelt stories that reflect the spirit of Cottonwood. I hope you will find inspiration in these pages—and feel the same pride I do in being part of this incredible community.

Thank you for your continued support and belief in our mission. Together we continue to be COTTONWOOD STRONG!!!!

Colleen Himmelberg

BOARDS OF TRUSTEES

Cottonwood Foundation

Tana Ahlen	Derek Kwan	Carrie Parker
Kristin Eldridge	Tom Larkin	Brandon Petz
Nick Gideon	Oliver Minnis	Miles Schnaer
Kurt Goeser	Tim Mock	Carolyn Stewart
Brian Hanni	Allison Vance Moore	J. Taylor
Colleen Himmelberg	Martin Moore	Andy Vigna
		Kimberly Williams

Cottonwood Incorporated

Doug Anderson	Mary Carson	Kristi Laclé
Dana Baker	Adam Courtney	Shirley Martin-Smith
Jill Baker	Robert Day	Mike Polanis
Barbara Ballard	Beth Easter	Jeff Sigler
Mike Bernholtz	Marilyn Heck	Paul Werner
Zak Bolick	Jeff Heiman	Carl Locke (Emeritus)
Perry Buck		

CONTACT is published for the friends and supporters of Cottonwood, Inc. by the Community Relations and Development Department: Ettie Brightwell and Kari Bentzinger.

Cottonwood Incorporated is a 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit organization that serves children and adults with intellectual/developmental disabilities. Cottonwood provides an array of employment options, onsite and in other parts of the community, day activity programs as well as residential, and case management services. Cottonwood is a member of Interhab, the Resource Network for Kansans with Disabilities.

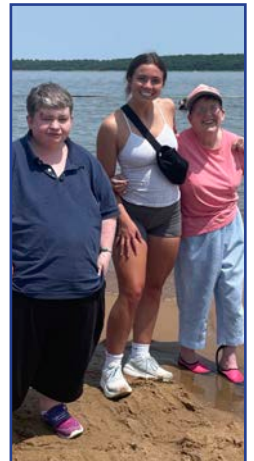
Cottonwood is partially funded on a contractual basis with the Kansas Department for Aging & Disability Services. Cottonwood receives some funding from Douglas and Jefferson Counties. Cottonwood is an affirmative action equal opportunity employer. We do business in accordance with the Federal Fair Housing Law. (The Fair Housing Amendment Act of 1998)

An adapted version of this publication and other materials are available by calling 785.842.0550 or by visiting us on the web at www.cwood.org.





National Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) Week (September 8th -12th, 2025) is a time to honor the incredible dedication, compassion, and impact made by our DSPs. These professionals are the heart of our mission, providing essential support that empowers individuals to live with dignity, independence, and joy. Their work goes well beyond daily tasks—they build relationships, advocate fiercely, and create safe, inclusive environments where everyone can thrive. We are deeply grateful for their unwavering commitment and the difference they make each day.



Throughout the week, our staff was recognized with shout out signage, a visit from the UpLift Coffee Truck to fuel their day, delicious cookies from Eileen's to sweeten the celebration, a visit from the Prime Ice Cream Truck to cool off on a hot day, and a special gift included in their paychecks to further demonstrate our appreciation for all DSPs do. It is our way of saying THANK YOU for the heart, energy, and excellence they bring to our Cottonwood community.





JobLink

...a division of Cottonwood, Inc.

EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH



May - Taimée

I have been working at Pizza Hut for 5 years! I fold pizza boxes and fill marinara containers. I like having a job. I'm a social butterfly and I like my co-workers. Stay on task would be my advice for being a good employee.



June - Amy

I have worked at McDonald's for years. I dry serving trays, place paper liners on trays. I like my job because it's paid employment. My team is very supportive and makes me feel like an important part of the team. My advice is do the best you can. Always be honest to gain/have respect from your boss and teammates.

July - Judith

I have been working at KU South Dining for 7 years. I am a crew leader. Sometimes I work at Starbucks or serve food to students. I like my co-workers and talking to the students. My advice is to always be on time for work and help your co-workers. (Not pictured)



August - Karen

I have worked at Mrs. E's since April 2022. I take care of the Grubhub orders and follow the allergy protocols. I also do deep cleaning when I'm caught up on my work. I like my job because it's fun and it serves some form of exercise. My advice is to always follow directions. Make sure you have everything ready on time. Do your work.



September - Gabe

I have been working at Presbyterian Manor for 9 months. I am a housekeeper and clean the common areas and resident rooms. Everybody is friendly and they say I'm a hard worker and keep everything nice.

My advice is to do a good job and work hard.

Have good attendance and

keep up with your work.

-Gabe, September Employee of the Month

VOTED #1



Staffing Agency

4 years in a row!

We have benefitted just as much, if not more, from hiring Jason. The smiles, laughs, and his dependability are just some of the perks. He is a loyal, dedicated community member and we are proud to have him. Highly recommend organizations do this and see how much everyone becomes just a little better of a human by just offering an opportunity to someone. Worth it.

-City of Eudora, September Employer of the Month



JobLink

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May
Walmart



June
Arbor Court



July
Clinton Parkway Nursery

EMPLOYERS OF THE MONTH

JobLink provides consultation and resources that help meet the workforce needs of more than 200 employers. Unique among employment agencies in the Lawrence, Kansas area, we analyze job requirements and customize a job match with qualified and reliable workers.

We are the only locally based, licensed, accredited, and certified disability-related employment service.

Contact JobLink today for qualified candidates. JobLink candidates have a variety of skills and abilities with an array of educational levels and work experience.

- Reduced hiring costs
- Customized service
- Hiring flexibility
- Payroll savings
- On-site training
- Community partnerships
- All about teamwork



September
City of Eudora



August
Meat, LLC

Contact JobLink Today
for Qualified Candidates.
You'll find that we share
your commitment to quality.

Contact Phil Bentzinger for
more information at
785-840-1623 or
pbentzinger@cwood.org

We appreciate your partnership!

COTTONWOOD Industries

Choose Cottonwood Industries For Your Production Needs



Packaging

ASSEMBLY

COMMERCIAL SEWING

Quality On Time Delivery

Production

WAREHOUSE

There is always a buzz of activity at Cottonwood Industries, and this past year has been no exception. For over 135 months (that's over 11 years!) in a row, there has been over 100% work availability. Our team is able to pivot seamlessly between working on cargo strap orders to fulfilling home lab kits to making poppies for the VFW to sewing protective wear for private aircraft landing gear. Consumers, sewing operators and A1 production workers all have the opportunity to work on the various lines together. On average, the consumer wage increased by \$.85 per hour due to the use of this automation. The diverse contracts secured by Cottonwood Industries continue to offer meaningful, skill-building opportunities that empower individuals to earn income while contributing to a wide range of local and regional businesses.



For more information on partnering with Cottonwood Industries, contact
Robert Bieberle, Business Development Manager rbieberle@cwood.org or 785-842-0550

Celebrating Work Anniversaries



Thank you for being all my friends, I do love you! - Dawn



I've come a long ways since I got in to Cottonwood. - Pennie



Thank you to all my friends and staff here for 29 years. - Jamie



Albert -52 years!



Each month, we celebrate milestones for person-supported working in Cottonwood Industries. It is such fun to see the excitement, joy and pride on everyone's faces as they are recognized for their outstanding work achievement!



I work hard for the company. I want you to do the same thing I'm doing- show the people you can do it! - Wade



Thank you guys for all the hard work you've been doing for me. -Donald



Thank you so much! - Shelby

Day Enrichment



CORE--Community Outreach, Recreation, and Enrichment—is living up to its name by offering vibrant, person-centered experiences that emphasize community access and meaningful engagement. The program is designed to support individuals as they pursue fulfilling activities tailored to their interests and goals. Some individuals have chosen to engage in CORE full-time, having expressed that traditional work environments no longer align with their needs or aspirations. Others continue to work part-time—at Cottonwood Industries and/or elsewhere in the community and while also enjoying the enriching opportunities CORE provides during the rest of their week.



The Art Show was a wonderful success!

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who attended and supported the event. Your presence helped create an inspiring atmosphere filled with creativity and community spirit. We're thrilled to share that proceeds from the show went directly to the talented artists. We appreciate you being part of this celebration of art!



Day Enrichment



COTTONWOOD MINIMASTERS



Yet again, the Cottonwood MiniMasters did not disappoint upon its return to the Cottonwood property on Thursday, September 25, 2025!! It was an absolutely beautiful evening in Lawrence. There was delicious pizza from Toppers Pizza and an icy sweet treat from the Kona Ice Truck for all participants. Thank you to Putt Around KC Mini Golf for the amazing miniature golf set up. The Clubs were hot as Cottonwood consumers, staff and family members played their way through it, but the hottest clubs of all belonged to Deb T. and Grant M. for their sizzling 1st & 2nd place

finishes. There were some serious dance moves displayed in the ever-popular street dance while other folks displayed amazing fishing skills by hooking prizes at the fishpond! Participants flocked to a very talented airbrush tattoo artist and a balloon twisting artist to get wonderful souvenirs of the evening! We also had a wonderful time with the animals from Peachy Farms. What a fun night with all of our friends! The only downer is that we have to wait until next year for MiniMasters 2026!





CEO, Colleen Himmelberg and
Jeff Whittier, Director of Support Services,
attended the
ACCSES Conference in
Washington DC this summer.

Take A Tour

We are very proud of the meaningful work that is done at Cottonwood to support people with disabilities. Come see for yourself how amazing Cottonwood is! If you are interested in finding out more about Cottonwood and/or touring our facility, please contact Ettie Brightwell, Director of Community Relations/Development at ebrightwell@cwood.org or (785) 842-0550.



Kim Murphree



LMH Leadership Academy



Double Tree by Hilton Hotel Lawrence



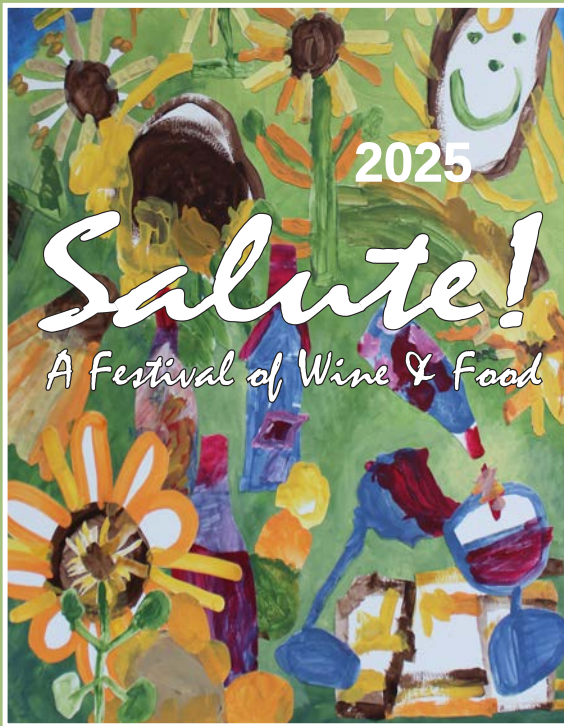
Berry Global



O'Connell Children's Shelter



Lawrence Business Exchange



THANK YOU!

2025 marked the 26th anniversary of Salute! A Festival of Wine and Food. The festivities began with the beloved Mass St. Mosey on a typical Kansas July evening (HOT!), Thursday evening, July 10th. Guests enjoyed reconnecting with old friends and making new ones while sampling wine and delicious bites at 12 Mosey stops along Mass. Street.

Salute! remains Cottonwood's largest fundraising event, and 2025 was no exception—raising over \$200,000 to support our mission of helping people with disabilities to shape their own future. This event would not be possible without the incredible support from Standard Beverage Corporation, THANK YOU! A special thank you to all of our sponsors, participants, donors and volunteers for their strong and unwavering support. Proceeds from Salute enable us to drive our mission of helping people with disabilities shape their own future and lead their best lives. Your generosity makes a lasting impact.



This year's Winemaker Dinner was hosted at The Oread Hotel on Friday, July 11th featuring a wonderful selection of wines from The Prisoner Wine Company. Attendees were treated to a memorable 5 course meal, with expert wine pairings guided by Prisoner winemaker, Molly Zook, making for an unforgettable culinary experience.



The celebration culminated on Saturday, July 12th, with the Grand Tasting at The Oread Hotel, where over 500 guests gathered to explore a selection of 200 wines, beers, spirits, and mocktails, alongside tastings from 10 local restaurants and caterers. The energy was high during the live auction, led once again by our spirited friends, the Nigro Brothers Auctioneers, and a huge thank you to Brian Hanni, for his amazing work as our emcee.



Celebrate



We're please and honored to be voted 1st place in these Best of Lawrence categories this year!

- Best Place to Work (100+ employees)
- Best Nonprofit (Adult/Senior Services)
- Staffing Agency- JobLink-4th year in a row!
- Admin Asst (Nonprofit)- Jane Bowers
- Social Media (Nonprofit)

Thank you, Lawrence community!



Why I Give...

Giving to Cottonwood is easy—because the impact is real. I've had the privilege of seeing firsthand how Cottonwood transforms lives through its commitment to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Whether it's through financial support, sharing time, or making meaningful introductions, I give because I believe in the mission and the people behind it.

Cottonwood's legacy is rooted in compassion and community. From its beginnings, Cottonwood has consistently been a place where people are empowered to live with dignity, choice, and purpose. That's something worth investing in.

I encourage you to reach out to Cottonwood to find a way to get involved. Just one of the great ways to engage is through its JobLink program, which connects individuals with disabilities to meaningful employment opportunities in the community.

It's a powerful example of how Cottonwood helps people live fuller, more independent lives.

I give because I've seen the joy and pride in the faces of those served by Cottonwood. I give because I want others to experience that same joy. And I give because it's easy—whether it's a monthly contribution, a one-time gift, or simply connecting someone new to the organization.

If you haven't had the chance to visit Cottonwood, I'd be happy to help set up a tour. It's a place that will stay with you long after your visit.

-Robert Day



Making A Difference

	
Cash Bequests	Real Estate
Equities	Personal Property
Life Insurance	Appreciated Securities/Stock
Retirement Plan	Charitable Gift Annuities

LEGACY GIFTS

Your legacy gift to Cottonwood will leave a lasting imprint on the people we support and will ensure that our work continues well into the future. A legacy gift, such as a bequest in your will or a designation in your retirement plan, is a powerful way to continue supporting our mission for years to come.

By including Cottonwood in your estate plans, you will join a group of dedicated individuals who are committed to making sure our programs, services, and initiatives are sustained for generations. This type of gift can reflect your values, make a lasting impact, and allow you to leave a legacy that aligns with your life's passions.

A legacy gift can also provide you with potential tax benefits while making a significant difference in the lives of those we serve. Our team is available to discuss different ways to structure your gift in a manner that honors your personal, family, and financial goals.

STOCK GIFTS

With the recent market conditions, now may be an ideal time to make a gift that not only supports Cottonwood, but also provides you with potential tax benefits. Contact us for more information on this type of transaction.



QUALIFIED CHARITABLE DEDUCTIONS

Individuals who've attained age 70 1/2 may make QCDs.



ONE-TIME GIFT Your gift always makes a big difference!



MEMORIAL & HONORARIUM

Honor your loved one with a gift today.



MONTHLY GIVING

Help shape the future of the people we support year-round with a monthly automatic gift.



COMPANY MATCH

Increase the impact of your gift by utilizing your company's matching gift program



We would be honored to speak with you in more detail about the various opportunities to make a lasting contribution. If you have already included Cottonwood in your estate plans, we would love the opportunity to thank and honor you into our Legacy Circle.

The Cottonwood Foundation is a separate but affiliated 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization established to facilitate the contribution of funds for the benefit of Cottonwood, Inc. The Foundation's purpose is to promote and further the advancement of services at Cottonwood. With increased competition for limited philanthropic funds, gifts have become even more critical to help ensure a long, healthy future for Cottonwood, Inc. Contributions to the Cottonwood Foundation can be made in a number of ways, including cash, securities, real estate and personal property, life insurance, retirement plans, in-kind gifts, and planned gifts through a will or trust. Each contribution makes a difference and helps ensure the future of Cottonwood. The Cottonwood Foundation is a charitable organization, and gifts are tax deductible. Contact Ettie Brightwell, Director of Community Relations and Development, at (785) 842-0550

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**COTTONWOOD
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LIFE IS SHORT. WORK SOMEWHERE AWESOME.

Cottonwood will give you a welcoming work experience that broadens your understanding of and appreciation for the diversity of our fellow community members, sharpens your problem solving strategies, hones your organizational skills, provides numerous teamwork and collaboration opportunities- the list is long. Cottonwood employment also ties in directly with many fields of study: social work, speech/language pathology, healthcare, etc.

Cottonwood benefits available:

- Medical, dental and vision
- KPERS Retirement
- Paid sick and vacation

Contact Matthew Moore, Human Resources Coordinator, mmoore@cwood.org

