

SPRING 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 my tenure with Cottonwood grows, I continue to be filled with a deep sense of pride and gratitude for everything we've achieved together. The list of accomplishments over the past year is remarkable, including continued enhancement to ensure that our technology is robust, secure and accessible, continuing to build on our diversity of contracts in Cottonwood Industries, completion of an intricate wage study to ensure we are staying within the market for staff compensation, our most successful fundraising year yet for Cottonwood, and the unprecedented number of job placements we have found for persons-supported through our JobLink division, just to name a few.

All of these efforts and the tremendous engagement of staff each and every day to help us drive our mission of helping people with disabilities to shape their own future are truly awe-inspiring. Each of these accomplishments is a testament to the power of our collective effort.

The future is bright, and we have exciting plans on the horizon. We are looking at new options for Residential Services, new opportunities for our Community, Outreach, Recreation, Engagement (CORE) to share and experience our community, new ways to bring people into service and be part of our Cottonwood Team. These are just some of the plans we have for continued growth of Cottonwood and keeping us Cottonwood Strong!

We are more determined than ever to make a difference, and we invite you to join us on this journey. Enjoy this edition of the Contact to learn more about the amazing everyday happenings at Cottonwood.

*Colleen Himmelberg*

## Boards of Trustees



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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)

Labeling and mailing services for this newsletter have been provided by men and women of Cottonwood.

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](http://www.cwood.org).



# Welcome

## NEW COTTONWOOD FOUNDATION BOARD OF TRUSTEES



**NICK GIDEON** hails from Topeka, Kansas and has spent all but four years of his life in Kansas. He spent those four years at The University of the South graduating with a degree in Economics. Nick serves as the Lawrence Market President and Loan Officer for Silver Lake Bank. Nick and his wife, Tori, have three children which consume most of their free time, but Nick does enjoy golfing (when he can), watching sports and partaking in any other adventurous activity that comes his way.

**DEREK KWAN**, Executive Director of The Lied Center of Kansas since 2014, came to Lawrence from Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York City. While earning his MBA at the University of Wisconsin, Derek served as the Education and Outreach Coordinator for the Wisconsin Union Theater. He is a voting member of the Recording Academy, has production credits on over 60 albums, including the Grammy-winning Bebo de Cuba and NY Times Album of the Year, Lagrimas Negras. Derek and his wife, Clare, have 2 children. He enjoys sports cards and memorabilia.



**CAROLYN STEWART** graduated from the University of Kansas with a degree in Elementary Education and taught at Schwegler Elementary School for 8 years before making a career change to be a stay-at-home parent. While she was no longer a full-time teacher, she did numerous hours of volunteer work at the children's school, including running the book fair for 7 years and serving on the school's auction board. For the past 5 years, Carolyn has undertaken a new role as a stylist for a clothing company. Carolyn and her husband, Tom, have 2 children. In her free time, she loves fashion and sports.

**KIMBERLY WILLIAMS** is a Kansas native with deep roots in Douglas County and the city of Lawrence, where her family's rich heritage spans generations. After an exciting career as an international flight attendant, she ventured into the hotel industry as well as into entrepreneurship by founding Absolutely Organized! as well as working in interior design. These experiences provided her with valuable expertise on her current career path in real estate. Kimberly has been with McGrew Real Estate since 2012. Kimberly and her husband Billy have 3 children. She enjoys reading, playing tennis and pickleball, working out, hiking, birding and taking care of her family and plants.



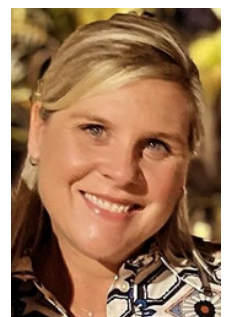
## NEW COTTONWOOD INC. BOARD OF TRUSTEES



### **MIKE BERNHOLTZ**,

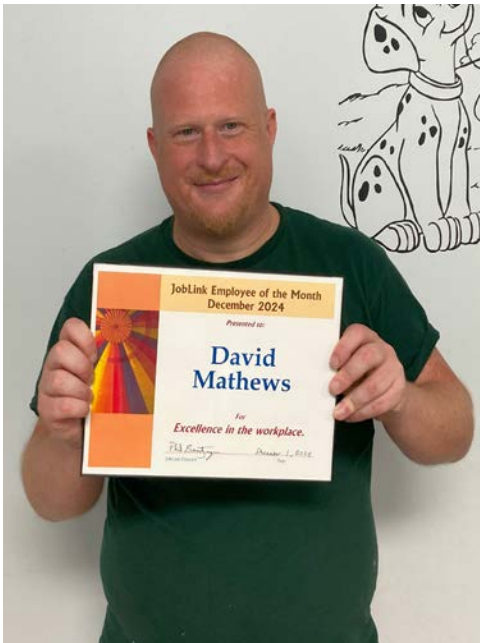
Plant Manager with Amarr Garage, grew up in West Des Moines, Iowa until he came to Olathe, Kansas to attend college and play football for MNU. After 17 years in Colorado Springs, he moved back to Olathe where he worked for a variety of manufacturing facilities before coming to Amarr. He and his wife, Lisa, have 6 grown children. In his leisure time, Mike enjoys golfing, weightlifting, travelling and skiing.

**KRISTI LACLÉ** was born and raised in the Lawrence and Douglas County community. She graduated from the University of Kansas with a degree in Communication Studies. Over the years, she has built a diverse career across multiple industries, working with organizations such as Sprint, the U.S. Ski & Snowboard Team, ML and Cerner. Kristi currently oversees engagement and operations, including the Jayhawk Center at the KU Alumni Association. Kristi and her husband, Pascual, have 2 children. Kristi calls herself "an avid traveler, skier, home chef and needlepointer when she is not busy watching the Kansas Jayhawks!"



**MICHAEL POLANIS**, General Manager at McFarlane Aviation in Baldwin, Kansas. Michael graduated from Elon University with a Bachelor of Science in Physics followed by a Master's Degree in Management Science, Supply Chain Management. Michael and his wife, Allison, live in Leawood, KS and have 2 children.

# EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH



**December - David**

*I have worked at Christal K-9 since June 2023. I bathe dogs, do doggie daycare and clean. Playing with dogs and giving love to the dogs is my favorite thing to do. I've been a good employee here because I know I do everything the boss asks. It helps to have a good environment.*

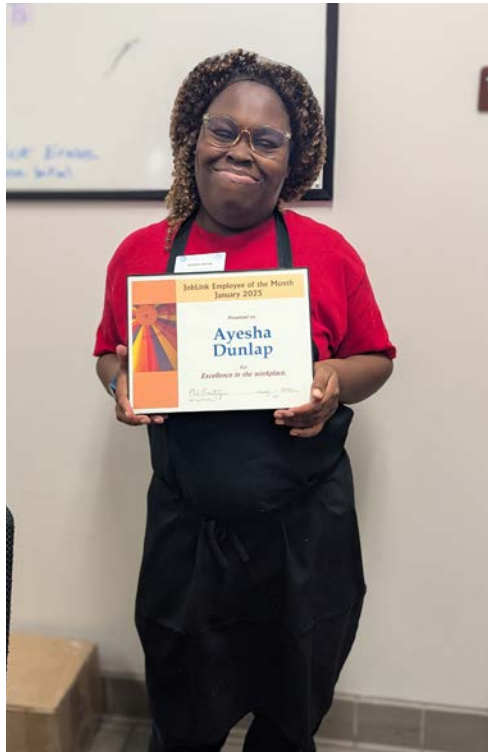


**March - Jeremiah**

*I have been working at Game Nut since September 2023. I sort, alphabetize and organize comics, posters, DVDs, CDs. My advice is to be flexible and patient, things change all the time.*

**January - Ayesha**

*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.*



**February - Daniel**

*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.*

*My advice is to always be on time for work and help your co-workers.*  
-Ayesha, Employee of the Month



**April - Todd**

*I have worked at Walmart for 6 months. I make sure the shelves are full for customers. My favorite job is stocking milk in the cooler. I like my job because of the people and the customers. Stay positive is my advice to be a good employee.*

# Congratulations!

## EMPLOYERS OF THE MONTH



November - SACK



December - Glory Days



January - Mass Beverage



February - Watkins Museum



March - Lawrence Free State High School



April - Sound Speech Therapy

*The job coaches and employees will work with you to attempt to meet everyone's needs. They will provide full support and taper off to allow for independence. Their communication is timely and collaborative. Best of all, the enjoyment you will get out of working with this organization will fill your cup!*

-Kimberly Williams, Owner, Sound Speech Therapy

## We appreciate your partnership!

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

**VOTED #1**



**Staffing Agency**

3 years in a row!

# COTTONWOOD Industries

What's all that buzzing? It's Cottonwood Industries! With work on approximately 20 different contracts, persons-supported have the opportunity to earn a paycheck while completing meaningful work and learning new skills in a fun and supportive work environment.



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

# Celebrate



"Thank you everybody for letting me be here 40 years after leaving the foster home I was in. I am very happy, very proud."

-Karrie



"I've been here alot of years. I'm happy, I'm working, making money. I sure appreciate what the staff have done for me - helping find jobs we do. I'm happy!"

-Barclay

"I'm just proud to be here 20 years!"

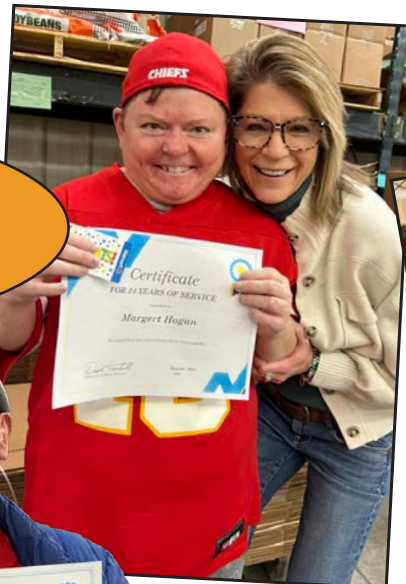
-Deb



Each month, we celebrate milestones for persons-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've been here enough, I know everyone. The one I admire is JR Condra. I really truly love my jobs."

-Margert



"Thanks everybody, I have alot of memories and I like to be here."

- Amy



# Shaping Futures



# Shaping Futures

Katie has made the move to supported independent living and she has embraced this new chapter with determination and enthusiasm. Making the move to her new home has allowed her to continue to develop essential life skills, such as managing her daily routines and planning for meals with her new roommates. These newfound responsibilities have not only boosted her confidence but also fostered a sense of independence.

Congratulations, Katie!!



Katie makes her lunch



Katie does her own laundry



Katie loves her friends

*I love my new house and roommates!  
I like that I can be more independent.  
- Katie*



Katie works at KU Dining

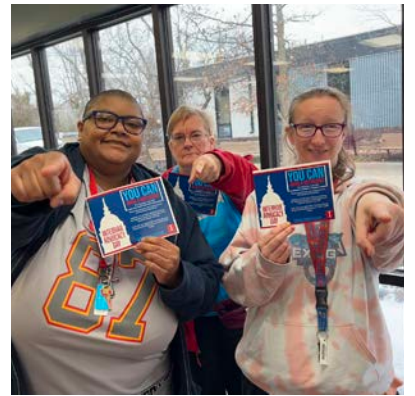


Katie with her staff and one of her roommates



Katie also works at Cottonwood Industries

# Advocate



On March 10, 2025, 30 members of the Cottonwood family traveled to Topeka to participate in Advocacy Day at the Capitol. Our own Cottonwood participants joined over 700 fellow Kansans with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the Capitol rotunda to make their voices heard by the Legislature—and they were definitely heard!! Thank you to all who participated!



# Take A Tour



Lawrence Chamber, Post Consumer Brands and SNAP Promotions



New Inc. Board Member, Mike Polanis



Kristin Eldridge & Kimberly Williams



LMH Health Partnerships



Nate Goertzen, Renaissance Financial



University of Kansas

We love having visitors at Cottonwood! Tours are the best way to experience what an amazing place Cottonwood is! If you are interested in learning more about Cottonwood, please contact Ettie Brightwell, Director of Community Relations & Development at [ebrightwell@cwood.org](mailto:ebrightwell@cwood.org) or (785) 842-0550.



KU International Short Program



Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services



Travis Walsh

# THANK YOU!



# THANK YOU!

Our project goal this year was to create an inclusive environment for persons-supported that removes barriers to enjoying the outdoors. The outdoor oasis will feature:

- Smooth, accessible walkways and adaptive seating for individuals of all abilities
- Shaded areas and rest zones designed for comfort and relaxation
- Classroom areas to conduct learning burst activities in a relaxing environment

This project is about more than just building a garden; it's about creating a space for connection, learning, relaxation and joy. We envision gathering here, a place where people of all abilities can come together to enjoy the beauty of nature and thanks to our generous donors, we have exceeded our goal and will begin building this oasis over the coming months. Thank You All!!

Mr. & Mrs. Mike Ahlen  
Dr. & Mrs. David Ambler  
Mr. & Mrs. Darron Ammann  
Anonymous  
Ms. Susan Arasmith  
Mr. & Mrs. Thomas Atwood  
Ms. Jill Baker  
Mr. & Mrs. Dave Baloga  
Mr. & Mrs. William Bartscher  
Mr. & Mrs. Smitty Belcher  
Mr. & Mrs. Phil Bentzinger  
Ms. Martha Berger  
Ms. Cristy Bidinger  
Dr. & Mrs. Lee Bittenbender  
Mr. & Mrs. Zak Bolick  
Ms. Theresa Browning  
Mr. & Mrs. Dave Bryan  
Ms. Cynthia Buttenhoff  
Ms. Linda Campbell  
Ms. Mary Carson  
Ms. Julie DeYoung  
Mr. Andrew Dierks  
Ms. Debra Duckworth  
Mr. & Mrs. Don Duryee  
Mr. & Mrs. Lee Eldridge

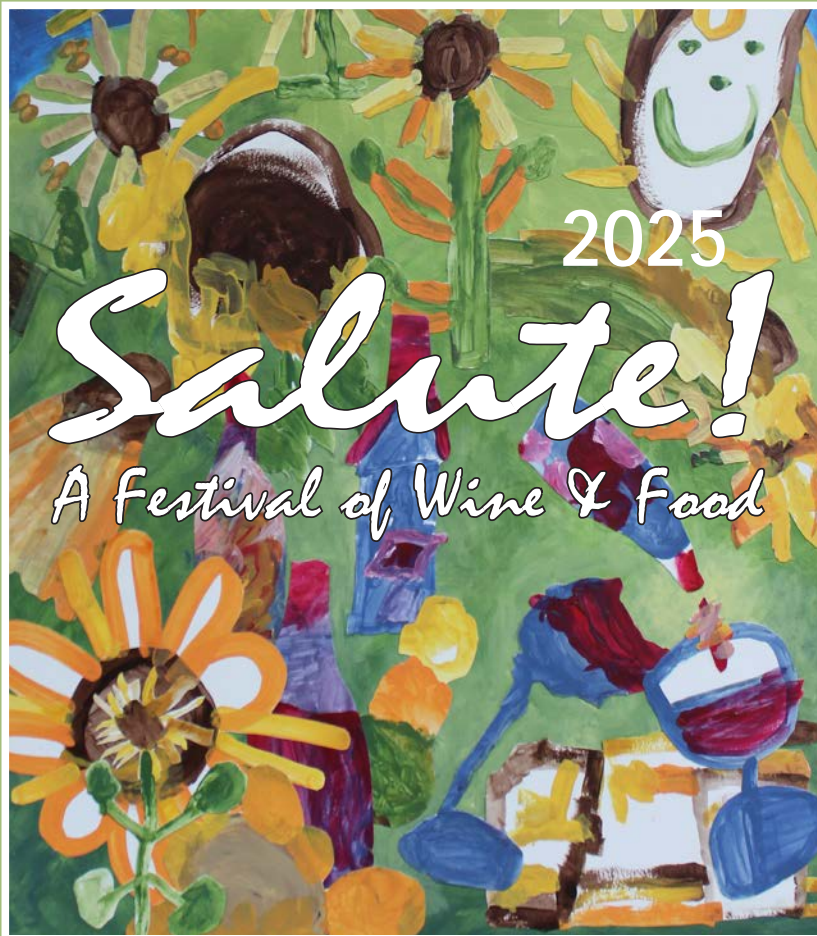
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Mr. & Mrs. Keith Ely  
Mr. & Mrs. Leon Fales  
Mr. & Mrs. Dale Flory  
Mr. & Mrs. Mike Flory  
Mr. Ralph Frey  
Ms. Elizabeth Furlong  
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Ms. Charlee Glinka  
Col & Mrs. Norman Greczyn  
Dr. Gary Grunewald  
Mr. & Mrs. Al Hack  
Ms. Beth Harrison  
Dr. & Mrs. Don Hatton  
Mr. Stan Hazlett  
Mr. & Mrs. Kelvin Heck  
Ms. Colleen Himmelberg Mr.  
& Mrs. Terry Hodge Drs. Eric  
& Pamela Huerter JLS Family  
Fund  
Mr. & Mrs. Don Johnston Dr.  
Rosemary Jones

Mr. & Mrs. Steve Kelly  
Mr. & Mrs. Rick Kittel  
Ms. Carole Koppes  
Kurt Goeser State Farm Insurance  
Lawrence Business Exchange  
Mr. & Mrs. Carl Locke  
Mr. Daniel Logan &  
Ms. Gladys Cofrin  
Mr. & Mrs. Steve Lopes  
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Ms. Shirley Martin-Smith  
Mr. & Mrs. Greg McDonald  
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the Douglas County  
Community Foundation  
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Linda Boochever  
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Ms. Laura Stephenson  
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Mr. & Mrs. Howard Stultz  
Mr. & Mrs. Derrill Swearingen  
Mr. Anthony Takacs  
Mr. & Mrs. Steve Tesdahl  
The Beach-Edwards  
Family Foundation  
Mr. Bruce Vaughn  
Mr. & Mrs. Kevan Vick  
Mr. & Mrs. Bob Vigna  
Mr. & Mrs. Richard Vigna  
Ms. Dian Volkmer  
Mr. Herb Weidensaul

# SAVE THESE DATES!

Standard Beverage Corporation & The Oread Lawrence Tapestry Collection by Hilton Presents:



Mark your calendars— Salute! 2025 is coming July 10th, 11th, and 12th! Salute! is our largest fundraiser of the year with proceeds from the events benefiting the people we support at Cottonwood. 2025 will mark the 26th year for this fabulous event!



Tickets go on sale June 2nd. Tickets are limited, so get in early to get yours! Enjoy the events and help us drive our mission of helping people with disabilities shape their own future at the same time.

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Thursday, July 10th  
*Mass St. Mosey*

Friday, July 11th  
*Winemaker Dinner*

Saturday, July 12th  
*Grand Tasting & Auctions*

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The Salute! 2025 artwork was created by some of our talented artists in our CORE program led by our talented guest artist, Megan McGlinn. You can own this fabulous artwork if you are the highest bidder during the 2025 Salute auction on July 12th, 2025.



Salute is a benefit for



[www.salutewinefest.com](http://www.salutewinefest.com) or 785-840-1604  
Attendees at all events must be at least 21 years of age

# Celebrate

Congratulations to these 2024 Employees of the Quarter!  
Employees of the Quarter are nominated by their peers for their excellence in service, performance, and their demonstrated support of Cottonwood's mission and values:

- Customer Satisfaction • Self Determination and Personal Growth • Teamwork
- Community Partners • Courtesy and Respect • Support



1st Quarter  
De'Antay Bourn  
Support Services



2nd Quarter  
Kelsey Snyder  
JobLink



3rd Quarter  
Zoe Surprise- Murphy  
Support Services



4th Quarter  
Whit Fast  
Residential



## Why I Give...

One of my core values is service. I am a believer that one reaps exponential rewards for giving and serving others. This concept has been affirmed time and again. Cottonwood shares this value in its mission of helping people with disabilities shape their own future. I've witnessed first-hand how services make a direct impact in the enrichment of the lives of the people they support, and the unwavering staff dedication to the choices of individuals. What started as a fun and easy way to give at the annual fundraiser, Salute Wine & Food Festival, led me to volunteer at the event. And a few years later, to join the Cottonwood Foundation Board, currently serving in the President's role. It is an honor to support the organization and continue to see the smiles and hearts of the people they support. And it is truly one of the greatest joys for both my family and me. I invite others to witness it for themselves--I will connect you! I also strongly encourage you to attend the Salute Wine & Food Festival and Cottonwood events for fun learning and giving. There is never a bad day when surrounded by people who love life.

-Kristin Eldridge



# Shaping Futures

## 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

Contact Ettie Brightwell, Director of Community Relations/Development, for more information. [ebrightwell@cwood.org](mailto:ebrightwell@cwood.org) or 785-842-0550.



**COTTONWOOD  
INCORPORATED**

2801 W 31st St.  
Lawrence, KS 66047-3049

NON-PROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
U.S. Postage  
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Lawrence, Kansas  
Permit No. 115



Do you know someone who is looking for a job that is truly rewarding and interesting?

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](mailto:mmoore@cwood.org)