

PROGRESS



A Publication for the Friends of Unified Community Connections

WINTER 2022

Hoodstock Reaches \$1 Million Goal

We did it! With the \$106,000 raised at Hoodstock XIX, we have officially raised \$1 million since Hoodstock started in Russ and Jen Causey's backyard nineteen years ago.

A sincere thank you to Russ Causey, who has chaired Hoodstock and performed each year since its inception. Today, Hoodstock is Unified's signature fundraiser, and the proceeds benefit individuals living with disabilities by supporting Unified's programs and services.

"I am blown away by the growth of Hoodstock. To go from my city backyard and generating \$1,200, to performing at The Winslow for more than 400 people and raising \$106,000, is beyond anything I could have ever imagined," says Russ. "We never would have made it without the support of my life partner, Jen Causey, and my Hoodstock partner, Lauren Bussard. I am so proud of what Hoodstock has accomplished and the village of volunteers that makes it happen."

Hoodstock XIX featured Russ' band Roses n Rust and live music by The Wafflers, The Ooh La La's and Exit, showcasing the rock/folk music scene of the late '60s and '70s, mixed with today's music.

A highlight of the evening was the presentation of the Samuel A. Tucker Memorial Can Do Award to Jerel Layne by Baltimore Ravens Senior Advisor for Player Development and former Unified board member O.J. Brigance. Jerel was recognized for his work over the past eight years with Unified's Assistive Technology program using his Nova Chat communication device. O.J. asked everyone to give Jerel a standing ovation for his determination to become an independent and active member of the community.



Jerel's family and friends were present to help him celebrate, and he was overjoyed at the standing ovation. In accepting the award Jerel said, using his Nova Chat, that he is a very happy person who loves to interact with people and stay active.



▲ Hoodstock headliner, Roses n Rust.



▲ Guests enjoy the photo booth.



▲ Hoodstock Chair Russ Causey.

He also expressed gratitude to Angela Lane, director of Unified's No Boundaries Assistive Technology Center.

President and CEO Amy Kreitz thanked everyone for coming and supporting Unified and told the audience how much their support means to the individuals Unified serves.

Thank you to Hoodstock committee members: Kathy Bradley, Julie Carper, Blake Curry, Migena Dilolli, Angela Lane, Nick Richardson and Emily Sutorius.

Let's get ready for an even bigger blowout on **Nov. 10, 2023**, for the twentieth anniversary edition of Hoodstock.

Thank You to Our Hoodstock XIX Sponsors

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Development News

The **Greenspring Advisors Grant Program** awarded Unified \$10,000 to enhance and rebuild its Employment Services program in Hagerstown. A portion of the funds will be applied to a \$3,000 annual membership in Maryland Works' Provider Network group, allowing Unified to enroll staff in educational programs or professional development training workshops. The remaining funds will be used to give staff the opportunity each quarter to participate in at least one educational program or workshop.

The **Washington County Gaming Commission** awarded Unified \$4,928 to purchase community theater tickets for individuals in Washington County who receive our support. This gift enhances our Community Development Services (CDS) program in Hagerstown, which provides individuals with disabilities opportunities to participate and engage in their communities to help build confidence and social skills. These funds will allow all 44 CDS participants to attend two shows throughout the year at either Antietam Recreation or the Washington County Playhouse Dinner Theater.

The **Maryland Transportation Association (MTA)** awarded Unified \$234,000 to purchase four new vans for our fleet of vehicles that transport individuals to and from our day habilitation centers, work sites, medical appointments, recreational outings as well as local community sites such as banks, churches, libraries and stores.



▲ Unified's Development Director Lauren Bussard and Regional Operations Director in Hagerstown and Cumberland Lenward Nealy attended the Greenspring Advisors Client Appreciation Event to accept the grant program award.

End-of-Year Giving

This holiday season please remember Unified and the individuals we support.

Donate online at [Unified.org/donate](https://unified.org/donate) or send a check to:
Unified Community Connections
952 Ridgebrook Road, Suite 1000
Sparks, MD 21152

Jerel Layne Receives 2022 Can Do Award

Congratulations to Jerel Layne, recipient of the 2022 Samuel A. Tucker Memorial Can Do Award. Jerel, who has an intellectual disability that makes his speech difficult to understand, has worked monthly for the past eight years with Unified's Assistive Technology Services to learn and practice with a Nova Chat communication device. Jerel demonstrated the device's functionality when he spoke at this year's Hoodstock XIX upon receiving his award, with family and friends cheering him on.

A resident of Beltsville, Maryland, Jerel's use of his Nova Chat has really helped him communicate his needs and achieve more independence in life. As an active member of the community, participating in Zumba, book club, music class and bowling, Jerel uses his communication device to share his wants, needs and stories with others. He loves using it to share videos of himself participating in community events and then uses his vocabulary to talk about his adventures. With the safety of having a means to communicate, Jerel has even started to take MetroAccess for transportation.

Over the past several years, Jerel has also used his Nova Chat to learn letters, numbers and colors. Last year, Unified staff programmed a speech on Jerel's Nova Chat so he could wish his sister a happy birthday. This year, at Jerel's 30th birthday party, he used it to give a speech to all who attended.

Jerel was so excited in January 2021 to receive a brand new Nova Chat. He is a social person, and his Nova Chat has given him the opportunity to independently share his thoughts with familiar and unfamiliar listeners. Jerel has come a very long way with his communication and pre-academic skills over the past eight years, and his accomplishments toward independence make him a deserving recipient of the Can Do Award.

Jerel used his Nova Chat to give his acceptance speech. ▶



Jerel celebrated with his family at Hoodstock XIX. ▼



Maryland Becomes a Technology First State

This year was especially appropriate to name Jerel as the Can Do Award recipient. In August, Governor Larry Hogan proclaimed Maryland a Technology First State, which means Maryland strives to benefit people with intellectual and developmental disabilities by expanding access to technology to improve the quality of their lives. Maryland is the eighth state in the nation to launch this initiative.

Welcome Jody Gatuso



Join us in welcoming new board member **Jody Gatuso, MBA, CM**, who will be joining the Quality Assurance Committee of the board. Jody is a senior health care operations and strategy leader with more than 24 years of experience assessing programs and improving revenue and performance. She served as the Ambulatory Expansion Finance Manager of MedStar Ambulatory Services for MedStar Health, where she led expansion efforts, developed operational vision and oversaw strategic projects to expand and enhance services. Jody previously held positions as program manager NIA for MedStar Health Research Institute; interim senior director operations for MedStar Lafayette Surgery Center; and interim payor enrollment officer for Medstar Rehabilitation Network Outpatient Physical Therapy. She has also held many positions with Johns Hopkins Medicine and even lived in Trinidad for a year while serving as assistant director, Project Development, Global Services for Johns Hopkins Medicine International.

Jody holds a Bachelor of Science degree in business administration from Salisbury University, an MBA in finance and investment from Mount St. Mary's University and a certified manager degree from James Madison University. She lives in Stamford, Connecticut, and enjoys traveling, art and visiting New York City.

Around the Agency



▲ Individuals from Unified's CDS program visit Toys R Us.



▲ Hagerstown residents root for the Orioles.



▲ Individuals enjoy being back in person at the Frederick Center Day Program.



▲ Individuals from Frederick have an 80s-themed prom.

Save the Date!

Mark your calendars for Unified's **17th Annual Golf Classic** on **Monday, May 1, 2023**, at the Elkrigde Club.



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Staff News

Jessica Fonferek has been promoted to director of operations in Cumberland. Jessica has been with Unified since 2007. She started her career with Unified as a personal development assistant when she was 19 and soon became a house manager in Hagerstown, a position she held for more than 10 years. She then was promoted to assistant residential director in Hagerstown and, after two years, became residential director in Frederick until she was promoted to her current position. Jessica is a true Unified success story.

Noel Okai is the new director of operations for the Baltimore area. Noel brings more than 20 years of experience in the field and came to Unified from Fidelity Resources, where he was program director supervising all program managers and the quality assurance administrator. He was also deputy director of operations for The Chimes, Inc., and project director for the Mid-Atlantic Human Service Corp. Noel has a B.A. in psychology and an M.S. in healthcare administration from the University of Phoenix.

OUR MISSION:

To support individuals with disabilities in achieving independence, productivity, and the quality of life they seek.