

May 2023

# GOC GAZETTE



Gainesville Opportunity Center

(352) 224-5523

1210 NW 14th Ave, Gainesville, FL 32601

[www.goclubhouse.org](http://www.goclubhouse.org)

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[Gainesville.opportunity.ctr@gmail.com](mailto:Gainesville.opportunity.ctr@gmail.com)

## It Has Started



**Our building was once someone's house. Our improvements will help it resemble a work environment.**

Something is going on at the GOC. There is a hole right where our kitchen is supposed to be. Why? Our kitchen project has officially started. It has taken over a year to get the permitting and other details finalized. Now, the construction is beginning.

The GOC is upgrading from a home-style kitchen to something you would find in a restaurant. This means we will be able to serve more Members, and they will get to work in an environment similar to being in the work force. This kitchen will be a significant tool to help our members build confidence in their abilities.

We would like to acknowledge many of the people who have helped make this happen. The Rotary Foundation of Gainesville is paying for the renovation, and the kitchen will be named in their honor. The Foundation consists of people from the 4 Rotary Clubs in Gainesville. Their annual Wild Game Feast event raised enough money to pay up to \$60,000 towards our renovations.

Some other special Rotarians have stepped up with major contributions to our project. Architect Michael Pellett drew up plans that include partial removal of a wall and installation of new sinks and plumbing. Rotarian Bryan Nazworth and Quality Plumbing is donating parts and labor toward the project. Commercial Builder Michael Conroy helped plan the event and shop for our goods. Dalton Baker and D.R. Baker Construction are donating services to coordinate the entire project.

The GOC will operate for the next 6 weeks out of the Grace Presbyterian Church. We are grateful they are opening their doors to us. It's all about our Members. The GOC and the Rotary Foundation are seeing to it that we will be able to serve our Members for years to come.



**(Left) GOC Member Joe Van Jenkins and Board Member Mercy Quiroga help get the house ready for our big project.**

**(Right) Our home-style kitchen before the construction.**



# GOC GAZETTE

## Member Spotlight: Ryan Jones

by David Stevens



Since finding the GOC, things have changed for the better for Ryan.

Meet Ryan Jones! In 2006, Ryan was a freshman on scholarship at UF when his illness hit. Late teenage years are a common time for mental illnesses to develop. Ryan tried taking medical leave from the university but eventually had to withdraw. Over the next 6 years, he spent more than a year inpatient and was hospitalized several times as, in his words “he kept trying the things that would have worked had I not been ill - only to fail harder and harder. It was equal parts confusing and terrifying.”

Around 2012, Ryan was released from the hospital and went back to his parents’ house in Archer. As Ryan describes it, “he had to get a job or do something more than literally curl up under my desk and family kept saying he had to take steps but was depressed and worn down and just very, very confused about what options were even available - like a learned helplessness. 6 years of illness, of intense depression, of the search for the right medication, of the emotional extremes, the confusion, and all of the other ‘failures’ and stress that went along with that struggle had really, really worn me down. There is a point where

your prime motivation is just to try and avoid the painfulness of it.”

Then Ryan found the GOC. The first day here, Ryan was asked what he was passionate about and interested in. This was the first time in a few years that anyone had asked Ryan such a question. The shift in focus from what needs to be avoided to what was healthy and worthwhile in his life was a major factor that helped him move forward. He says “It was one of those moments that was a very clear turning point.”

Ryan points out that as you invest more and more time to understanding and treating the pathology of an illness, it can become easy for that person to lose sight of how they are more than the sum of their pathologies. Before coming to the GOC, Ryan and the people in his life were trying to help him ‘not be sick.’ The GOC helped Ryan refocus on pursuing wellness. It helped him learn to use the things that were going right in his life as building blocks.

Since coming to the GOC, Ryan’s life has changed. He has since graduated with a degree in Biomedical Engineering Electronics. He enjoys working full time as a cybersecurity consultant. Most importantly, Ryan has found and married the love of his life, Keana, and is about to celebrate the first birthday of their child, Kaleb.

Ryan attends the GOC once a week. He says, “The GOC community has made a major impact in my life and is a part of who I am. The social connections here are as healing for me now as they were at the height of my illness.”

Ryan says he is thankful for the GOC. At the GOC, we are thankful, proud, and grateful for Ryan.



Even with a cybersecurity job and a new family, Ryan says the GOC will remain a major part of his life.

# GOC GAZETTE

## GOC Champions at Special Olympics, Moving on to State Competition!

The GOC fielded its first Bocce ball team for competition at the regional Special Olympics competition on April, 1, 2023. Joanna Broaudes, Akeem Johnson, Lasheka Roberts, and Karen Lovely make up the unified team. They defeated Special Olympics staff in an exhibition match 5-3 to clinch their spot at state competition. Kim Sugar, Lasheka Roberts, and Akeem Johnson also participated in singles competition. Kim Sugar achieved second place in a very close match. Akeem Johnson and Lasheka Roberts easily defeated their competition on the way to first place finishes and high rankings headed into the state competition at the Wide World of Sports Complex at Disney in Orlando, FL. State competition is May 19-20.



## GOC Bike Day

The GOC 2nd annual Bike Day is coming Saturday May 13. Join us in promoting awareness and support for people living with chronic mental illness by riding with us on the Hawthorne Trail. We will start and finish from First Magnitude Brewery. Registration will start at 9 AM, with the bike ride at 10 AM. After the ride, we will have a celebration with music, food, and dancing until 1pm.

Cyclists will be able to ride at their own pace on three suggested courses:

- 1-Beginners can circle Depot Park. You decide how long you want to ride.
- 2- Intermediate riders can take a 6 mile path down Hawthorne Trail to La Chua Trail and back.
- 3- Advanced riders can go 24 miles on the trail, from First Magnitude to Hawthorne and back.

Even if you don't ride, you can still come out and support us. The Gainesville Garden Club will be walking around Depot Park. After the ride, from about 11 AM to 1 PM we will have music, socializing, and food trucks on hand to wrap up the event. <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/bike-day-2023-tickets-529463358157?aff=ebdsoporgprofile>

## Sponsors

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Exit Realty Producers	Satch Squared
First Federal Bank	Straw and Company
First Magnitude Brewery	Subaru of Gainesville
Friends of Laurie Russo	Sweetwater Framing



# GOC GAZETTE

## Updates

### Advocacy

GOC Members Zennie Best and Debbie Best live in Palatka, which is about an hour from Gainesville. They have long advocated for a Clubhouse in their area. Thanks to their work, Brett Buell was invited to speak at a Palatka City Commission meeting about programs like ours. We hope this advocacy will lead to expansion of our type of services.



### Community

One of the many great things about the Clubhouse Community is that we learn from and support each other. Mia Chisholm, Paul LeBlanc, and Karen Lovely from the GOC visited Vincent House Hernando. We went over their data entry procedures and spoke about employment practices. Although we are completely independent from one another, we advocate for services that help people have meaningful and productive lives.



### Office

The office unit is revamping the orientation process. For new Members, tours will be provided regularly on Wednesdays. Orientation will occur on Thursdays. A buddy system will be used to pair new Members to current Members. One of our main goals is to help people return to the workforce. A strong orientation system will only help those efforts.



### Employment

Add public speaking to Jordan Castle's resume.

Jordan shared a tremendous journey, and how anxiety has been an obstacle. After years of under-employment, Jordan is working full time at North Florida Hospital and is moving into independent housing.

Jordan shared that overcoming significant anxiety is possible. We are proud of Jordan's commitment and courage for sharing a compelling story of hope at our monthly Employment Dinner.



# GOC GAZETTE

## Monthly Calendar and Events

May 1st GOC Kitchen Remodel Starts

May 6th Social Saturday

May 13th 2nd Annual Bike Day

### Newsletter Credits:

**Brett Buell**  
Producer / Writer/  
Layout/Photos

**Rob Ellis**  
Photographer

**Paul LeBlanc**  
Photographer/  
Editor

**Reid Schreiber**  
Writer/Editor/  
Layout

**David Stevens**  
Writer

### Weekly Meetings

Monday 2:00 pm- House

Tuesday 2:00 pm- Culinary;

Wednesday 2:00 pm- Website

Wednesday 3:00 pm- Newsletter

Thursday 1:30 pm- Computer Workshop

Thursday 2:00 pm- Adobe/Media

Thursday 2:30 pm- Wellness



### Daily Events and Meetings

8:30 am Clubhouse Opens

9:00 am Breakfast starts

9:30 am General Membership Meeting

9:45 am Unit Meetings

10:00 am Work Day Commences in Office,  
Culinary, Media and Garden

12:00 pm Lunch

1:00 pm Afternoon Meeting

4:30 pm Clubhouse Closes

### Birthdays

May 1 John Waitcus

May 9 Paul LeBlanc

# GOC GAZETTE

## The Amazing Give

by Reid Schreiber

We had a tremendous Amazing Give event this year, raising the most we ever have. The total donations to the Gainesville Opportunity Center totaled \$35,546, much higher than our goal of \$25,000. Thank you to everyone whose generosity helped us have this great success! Most of the fundraising efforts for the Amazing Give came from Members, Board members, staff, and volunteers who reached out to friends and family to build support for the GOC. We are very grateful for all of the individuals who made this possible. We are grateful to the Community Foundation of North Central Florida for helping us exceed our goal.



**Nancy Ryan is a long-time GOC volunteer and supporter. She brought her donation in personally.**

Private giving is highly important to the GOC. We need donations to establish the budget diversity to make our program thrive. Currently, most of our funding comes from the Florida Department of Children and Families via Lutheran Services Florida. The funding level from the State is determined year-to-year. Also, state funds are intended to fund our program operations, which restricts us from some capital investments to improve our long term sustainability. Any way you look at it, private giving is vital to our long term success.



The Gainesville Opportunity Center is a driving force in the transformation of the lives of those living with mental illness. Our Members are discovering new interests and skills by participating in our program. They are realizing their lives have great worth. Recovery through the work of running our Clubhouses helps individuals return to a level of functioning where less intensive interventions are needed. Our Members feel fully capable of achieving satisfying, healthy lives. The GOC is a community providing the strengths and strategies needed for our Members to return to work with confidence.

**Board members and supporters went to Celebration Point after the event.**

Thanks, everyone, for putting amazing in the Amazing Give of 2023!

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## Sponsors and Supporters



# DONATE

Click here to donate with a bank card through the Community Foundation Philanthropy Hub. You can even make your gift recurring.



United Way  
of North Central Florida



Check with your employer for pre-tax donations. The University of Florida and The United Way allow you to choose the GOC for payroll deductions.



Our Amazon Wishlist has things we need. Check back from time to time as we update it.

Please Don't forget us in your will.

# GOC GAZETTE

## Month in Pictures



Construction includes partial removal of an exterior wall. This will increase our kitchen size by 50%.



Our construction team is moving fast. They have already removed what was once an exterior support wall.



During construction we are operating out of Grace Presbyterian.



The GOC participated with local Rotary Clubs during Earth Day.



Terrica started a new job with Alachua County. It is part of our Transitional Employment partnership.