



Gainesville Opportunity Center

GAZETTE

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New, Experienced Leadership

Gainesville Opportunity Center Welcomes New Executive Director, Margie Foster



The Gainesville Opportunity Center (GOC) is excited to welcome Margie Foster as our new Executive Director, starting on October 7, 2024. With over 25 years of experience in operations management, clinical behavioral services, and nonprofit leadership, Margie brings a wealth of knowledge and passion to her new role. Her background spans a range of industries, including behavioral health, in-home care, and nonprofit management, making her a perfect fit to lead the GOC in our mission to support adults living with chronic mental illness.

Margie says she is thrilled to be here and truly understands how much people living with chronic mental illness need the support the GOC provides. “The GOC provides a unique service that breaks isolation and helps our Members feel like they are part of our community. The support we give helps our Members build confidence and feel good about themselves.”

Margie holds a Master’s degree in Psychology and is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA). Throughout her career, she has demonstrated a unique ability to combine clinical expertise with strategic management, always with a focus on improving outcomes for individuals and communities. From increasing client engagement to implementing innovative systems for better service delivery, Margie’s experience will be instrumental in taking the GOC to new heights.

“We’re thrilled to have Margie on board,” says Brett Buell, Development Director of the GOC. “Her expertise in both mental health and nonprofit operations align perfectly with our mission, and we know she will make a lasting impact.”

Rotary Visits GOC



One of the major goals of our program is to help our Members break isolation and get out into the community. Interaction with civic organizations committed to service and community leadership can be a big part of that goal. Since the four Rotary Clubs that make up the Gainesville Rotary Foundation remodeled our kitchen and dining room, we were happy to host thank-you meals for them to share with our Members and staff.



GOC Fall Festival is Almost Here!



Mark your calendars for the GOC annual Fall Festival Open House on **Friday, November 15, 2024, from 11 AM to 5 PM** at our facility, located at 1210 NW 14th Avenue. This is a free event, open to everyone in the community!

Come meet our Members, tour our Clubhouse, and experience the supportive environment that helps adults living with mental illness thrive.

There will be music, fun activities, and a delicious lunch—suggested donation is \$10. You'll have a chance to see how we're empowering individuals to lead meaningful, productive lives.

Don't miss this opportunity to see the impact we're making together and to show your support. We can't wait to welcome you!

Big Thanks to our Fall Festival Sponsors:



Preparing for the Fall Festival



A group of GOC Members, staff, and volunteers from the University of Florida and the Rotary Clubs of Gainesville gathered at the GOC on November 1st and 2nd to help prepare the GOC grounds for the Fall Festival to be held November 15th.

After the storms we experienced in September and October, some general clean-up was needed, as well as pruning bushes, trimming walkways, etc. Things are looking good now and we can't wait to welcome the community as they enjoy the Fall Festival!

Board Member Joanne Edde works for one of our biggest supporters, First Federal Bank. She spent her Saturday helping clean up for our Fall Festival. When she isn't at work or at the GOC, Joanne spends time as a Chamber Diplomat. Thank you Joanne for all that you do to help others.



GOC Member Joel works full time. He does not come as much as he did when he was struggling to work.. Joel came to our Saturday yard cleanup to help our organization.

Forward Focus

A New Director, A New Direction

Our end of year donation letter will be going out soon.

Are you on the list? There are many needs that we have that our funding sources will not pay for. Your contributions can help here. Please email Brett Buell if you want to receive a heartwarming story in our end of year letter.

We hope to launch the GOC Ambassador Program in January. **As an Ambassador, you can help connect the GOC to key people who can help our mission.** That could include private donors, businesses that might sponsor us or employ our Members, or community leaders that can help us gain relevance in the community. Contact Brett Buell at the GOC if you are interested.

We're thrilled to welcome Margie Foster as the new Executive Director of the Gainesville Opportunity Center! With over 25 years of experience in behavioral health, end-of-life care, and community-based operations, Margie is bringing fresh energy and expertise to strengthen our mission. We're excited for you to meet her and learn more about her vision for the GOC.

Join us at our Fall Festival Open House on November 15 to connect with Margie, see our Clubhouse in action, and learn more about how we're making a difference in our community. We hope to see you there!



Brett Buell
Development Director
Gainesville Opportunity Center



Rotarian Patrick Irby purchased new fence posts, dug holes and fixed our fence that was damaged during the storms. That is one way of being an Ambassador.



Margie Foster, our new Executive Director, is with Brett Buell and Board Member Shoab Rana accepting our ten year anniversary plaque for our Chamber Membership.

Our Standards in Motion



Standard #32: *“The Clubhouse has recreational and social programs during evenings and on weekends. Holidays are celebrated on the actual day they are observed.”*

The GOC uses the Clubhouse International Standards to guide our mission of empowering adults living with mental illness. This month, we're highlighting Standard #32, which focuses on socials and holidays.

One Saturday per month we hold Social Saturday. Members come together to socialize at the house or go to events and attractions in the community. We recently went to the Appleton Museum in Ocala, fished at Newnan's Lake, and experienced the Butterfly Museum and Rotary Car Show. These events offer us a free space to come together and build a community. It's like a family gathering, and everyone is in good spirits.

Some of us living with acute mental illness have lost our friends, been separated from our families or removed from our support network.

When we're isolated, we have increasing symptoms like depression, loneliness, abandonment and despair.

To combat this, we build a family together at the Clubhouse and depend on one another, support each other and share cultural celebrations on holidays. We take pride in our house. We decorate our space, cook and share recipes together, present food and eat, play music and relax together.

It's important to give back to the community, so we participate in and volunteer with Special Olympics Florida. The GOC has the two-time state champion Unified Bocce team!

We also come together to work out at the YMCA each week.

Social Saturday Comes to Car Show



Events like the car show are an opportunity to return our Members to the community and engage with community partners. Here Margie Foster, Brett Buell, and Pat Bateman are with Alachua County Sheriff Emery Gainey.

Social Saturdays are a big part of our program. While most of our program focuses on the confidence and stamina Members get from accomplishing needed work-related tasks, forming meaningful friendships and sharing common experiences are also very important. Once a month, the GOC hosts a Social Saturday. In October, Members had the opportunity to attend the Fourth Annual International Car Show, hosted by the Rotary Clubs of Gainesville.

Taking GOC Members to the International Car Show aligns perfectly with the Clubhouse Model's focus on community engagement, social connection and building confidence through positive, shared experiences. Events like this help Members build essential social skills in a friendly, supportive environment. Being part of a large, vibrant community event introduces Members to new faces and

connects them with people who may not fully understand mental health challenges, but who can gain insight through meeting and interacting with GOC Members.

For many of our Members, participating in community events also reaffirms that they are valued and respected as part of the community and are not defined by their illness. A gathering of over 1,000 people provided plenty of opportunities for Members to practice social skills, enjoy a sense of camaraderie and feel part of something larger—all foundational to healing and growing through the Clubhouse Model. Plus, it's a chance for Members to witness the joy and energy of their community, inspiring them to continue building independence and exploring new interests.

Social Saturday

Social gatherings such as our monthly Social Saturday are important for more than just fun- they prevent isolation for Members who have re-entered the community and work or go to school full time.

The GOC fights this isolation with varied events throughout the year. This past year we went to a ballet, fished at Newnan's Lake, went to the Appleton Museum, Santa Fe Zoo, the Harn Museum, a Strawberry Festival in Newberry, FL and more. This way, there's truly something for everyone.



Attending the car show was a great opportunity to strengthen our relationship with the local Rotary Clubs. Their support truly helps amplify our mission. Every connection and shared moment helps build a stronger community that stands by our Members on their recovery journey.



At the GOC, we work together towards a common goal. This brings Members together and helps them see that they are a part of something bigger than themselves.



Board Member Mike Conlon was recognized for his many years of leadership and dedication to the GOC.



We took our Members to early voting. Taking ownership of their community is one of the benefits of joining a Clubhouse. Members take parts in all aspects of the Clubhouse, including decision making, so voting is a natural extension of what Members learn at the GOC.



Becky works with Kyana as they set up an event at the County Administration Building. The County staff has been very supportive of our Transitional Employment program.



Gainesville Opportunity Center

Month In Pictures



Rotarians Patrick Irby and Katherine Mockler volunteered for yard cleanup to help us prepare for the Fall Festival on November 15.

Patrick took it one step further by repairing our fence that was damaged in recent storms.



Our dedicated Board Members Jennifer Elder, Mike Conlon and Mercy Quiroga show they will do whatever it takes to help make the GOC better. They are definitely not afraid to get their hands, or whole bodies, dirty!



Whatever we do, Rotarians are here to support us. Thank you Greg Young, Patrick, Katherine, and Brett.



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Month In Pictures



Alina is one of our hardest working Members. She led a group of UF student volunteers for a big part of our yard cleanup. They had one of the hardest tasks: clearing some debris behind our shed and creating shelves to house our outdoor supplies.

Thank you to Alina for all that you do!

Volunteers from the Brown Center for Leadership and Service came out in force to help us clean up our grounds ahead of the Fall Festival. Working side by side with our Members, Board, and Staff provided them with a way to give back to their community, and for our Members to work with UF students.





Month In Pictures

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Joanna had a lot of trouble deciding on her dream car! There were so many possibilities!



The ultimate goal of the GOC is to help our Members rejoin the greater community. Members make real connections and even lasting friends here. On this Social Saturday, GOC Members packed a picnic lunch and enjoyed the car show.