

Summer 2025

DONKA DIGEST

Meet Our New Board Members



Abigail Taylor

We're excited to welcome Abby Taylor as our new Board Treasurer! Abby comes highly recommended by our former Treasurer, Greg Kunkel, her mentor and manager at Wheaton Bank & Trust for ten years. Abby brings her warm personality along with a strong passion for service and an enthusiasm to make a meaningful impact to our mission.



Glen Schwarz

Glen Schwarz, a Retired Navy Veteran, has been a volunteer with the DuPage Care Center's VETSO group for eight years, supporting veterans with disabilities. We're honored to have him join the Donka Board where his deep commitment to veterans and wealth of experience will help strengthen one of our core missions—serving those who served.



Greetings from the Executive Director!



Leanne Vos

This year, Leanne Vos celebrates 35 years of devoted service to Donka, and we are grateful for her unwavering leadership and steadfast commitment to Donka's mission of *Empowering Abilities Through Technology*.

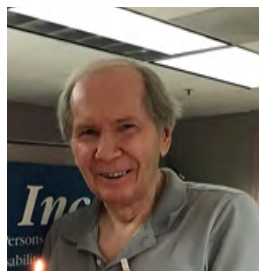
As Leanne reflects on her time here, she remembers her first visit to Donka with her sister Heidi. *"I felt an incredible energy in the computer lab. The students—individuals coping with blindness and quadriplegia—had Don Van Haveren (Donka's Founder) to lead them, mentor them, and be their friend. Don ignited hope and a brighter future for these students."*

Our Donka Family!



John, Nick, Emanuel, Sam, Leanne, Debbie, Anam, Linda, Carlos

Thank You to our Current Volunteers!



Endre Agocs



Jaron Allen

Meet Our New Team Members



John Strong

John Strong holds a degree in Computer Information Systems from Christian Brothers University and brings over 25 years of experience in Wireless Communications and Computer systems, working with major vendors and government contractors. He is committed to making a difference in students' lives and honored to join the Donka family, and we are equally excited to welcome him to the team of talented AT Instructors.



Anam Minhas

Anam Minhas joined Donka through the Job Placement Program and now serves as the Marketing, Communications & Development Specialist. She holds a B.S. in Marketing from NIU and has a deep passion for nonprofit work. As someone who is visually impaired, Anam understands firsthand the important role accessibility and assistive technology play in workforce development—fueling her commitment to helping others navigate similar journeys with confidence and support.

Success Stories

From Cancer Survivor To Disability Advocate: Meet Nicholas Craun, Donka's Inspiring New Intern

At Donka, we believe that the people who walk through our doors—whether students or staff—carry with them stories that shape our mission in powerful ways. We are thrilled to welcome Nicholas “Nick” Craun to our team as an intern this year. Working alongside Job Placement Specialist Carlos Johnson, Nick brings passion, resilience, and lived experience that make him an incredible addition to our organization.



Nick and Carlos at Donka Computer Lab

Nick's journey has been anything but easy—but it is one that fuels his purpose. In 2020, Nick was diagnosed with a cancerous brain tumor that halted his short-term plans. *“Chemo took a lot out of me energy-wise, and I wasn't motivated at first,” he shares. “But once I made it through recovery and entered remission, I realized I wanted to give back—to help others the way people helped me.”* That realization led him to change his college major from Computer Science to Rehabilitation Counseling

Nick obtained an Associate's Degree from Community College of Lake County in Laser Photonics and Optics, and his B.S. from Northern Illinois University (NIU) in Disability Rehabilitation Services. Now a Graduate student at NIU, Nick's path is deeply rooted in service, advocacy, and leadership as he is active in nearly every corner of NIU life. From climbing up the ranks to Vice President of his fraternity, Phi Sigma Kappa, to working at the Disability Resource Center and leading the Rehabilitation Counseling Student Association, Nick is devoted to this field—driven by a genuine desire to make a tangible difference and help people reach their full potential. Nick also shows support by regularly attending various sporting events at NIU to cheer on his peers because he understands the importance of community and encouragement.

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When asked what inclusion and accessibility mean to him for empowering people with disabilities, he says, *“Inclusion means providing the same opportunities to everyone despite their disability. Accessibility is making sure they have the tools and training they need to compete at the same level. It's about giving everyone a fair shot.”*

Nick's enthusiasm for Donka stems from his passion for Assistive Technology (AT) and a deep belief in human potential. *“What excites me most is seeing how different people adapt to challenges,” he says. “Often times, people with disabilities feel like they have limited options. I want to break those barriers and give people hope and confidence to encourage them to chase every opportunity.”*

Since joining Donka, Nick has already met with several clients and is eager to dive deeper into the job placement process.

“I always aim high, so I'd love to see at least half of the clients I work with gain employment during my time here.”

Nick also hopes to challenge common misconceptions about disability, especially invisible disabilities. *“People are always surprised to learn that I have a disability. But disability doesn't always look the way people expect it to.”*

Nick describes his NIU experience in three powerful words: Leadership. Opportunities. Growth. These qualities shine through in everything he does—and we can already see the impact he will have here at Donka.

“I don't know exactly where my path will take me yet,” Nick admits, “but I know I want to help people with disabilities pursue their dreams. I want to be the person who's there for someone—just like people were there for me.”

Nick's story is one of perseverance, heart, and hope—and we are proud to have him join the Donka family, as we continue our mission to break barriers and create opportunities for people with disabilities.



Ben Penachio

Donka Student Becomes a ComEd Energy Force Ambassador

A unique initiative that empowers individuals with developmental disabilities

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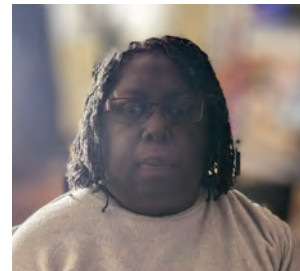
At Donka, we are always looking for opportunities that empower our students and create meaningful community impact. That is why we are thrilled that one of our students, Ben Penachio, has been selected as a ComEd Energy Force Ambassador this year!

ComEd has led the way in energy education through its Energy Force Ambassador Program, which trains talented individuals with developmental disabilities to educate communities about energy-saving strategies. These ambassadors play a crucial role in spreading awareness about ComEd's mission, engaging directly with the public at events throughout the year.

Ben's journey with Donka began through the LaGrange High School transition program, where he worked closely with our Assistive Technology Instructor, Linda Yurka, to master Dragon software and gain computer independence. From there, he transitioned to our job placement program, where he's been working with Carlos to explore career opportunities that maximize his potential.

We are incredibly proud of Ben and cannot wait to see the impact he makes as an Energy Force Ambassador!

Alicia Green, Student & Visionary



Alicia is a tenured Nurse who has transformed her loss of sight into newfound insight.

“Independence is everything. It's not just about getting from one place to another, it's about dignity, confidence, and the freedom to live life on my terms.” Alicia shares. “Just because I lost my sight doesn't mean I lost my ability. I just had to learn a new way to do things. And I did.”

Alicia is currently enrolled in 1:1 training with Donka Instructor Ann Byrne, focused on mastering essential skills in assistive technology and workplace adaptation.

Employment remains to be one of the biggest hurdles for individuals with low vision. Alicia's advice to employers is straightforward: *“If someone has the skills, give them a chance, provide the right tools, and you'll see just how much they can contribute.”*

Upcoming Events

Join Donka, Inc. in
ROCKIN' FOR OUR VETS
 Concert for Charity
 Saturday, July, 12 at Cantigny Park!



Donka is honored to be selected as a charitable partner by West Suburban Foundation for Disabled Veterans (WSFDV) for this year's *Rockin' for Our Vets* concert for charity at Cantigny Park!



Join us for an evening of music and meaning featuring the legendary Gary Sinise & the Lt. Dan Band!

In partnership with the Gary Sinise Foundation, WSFDV is putting on this special event to raise funds for charitable organizations—including Donka—that serve and uplift veterans facing various challenges.

Tickets are \$50 and selling out fast! Scan the QR code or go to www.wsfdv.org to get your tickets!

Can't attend? Pay it forward by purchasing a *"Treat a Vet"* ticket to send a veteran in your place!



SAVE THE DATE

Join us on Saturday, September 13, 2025 for Donka's 2nd Annual Trivia Night Fundraiser - an Unforgettable Evening of Movie Trivia, Raffles, Silent Auction & Fun! Hosted by Go4It Entertainment!

Your ticket purchase provides Computer and Assistive Technology (AT) Training and Job Placement Support for People with Disabilities, including Veterans and Seniors!

Grab your Early-Bird Tickets for \$25.00 before August 15, 2025. After that, tickets will be \$30.00. Space is limited, so reserve your spot today at www.donkainc.org!

THANK YOU SPONSORS



Donka is a 38-year-old, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization established in January 1987. Donka's mission *"Empowering Abilities Through Technology"* is to provide comprehensive computer training and job placement services to facilitate the development of immediately useful skills for today's job market and higher education. Donka is the only organization in our service area to offer no-cost training via a low student-teacher ratio (1:1 or 2:1) using a curriculum that is customized for each student.

Donka's curriculum is approved by the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), which allows us to offer graduates a "Certificate of Completion" that is recognized by other IBHE approved institutions. We are also approved as a computer skills training provider by the Illinois Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), Illinois Bureau of Blind Services (BBS), Illinois Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) program, and the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA).

It is only through vigorous fundraising and supporters like you, Donka can offer training at no-cost to most students, over 95 percent of whom are low-income.

A Salute To Our Graduates!

Donka Graduates 2025 YTD

Clint Shields	Ali Augustyn
Nicole Levintre-Malm	Alicia Green
Sharon Kettman	Cody Marbutt
Peter Jendruczek	Brian Shue
Joseph Weakland	

Donka Graduates 2024

Ronald Ice	Willard Fruits
Amanda Stogsdill	Karina Dul
Anastacia Benavides	Mary Fowler
Gerald O'Connell	Adam West
Ralph Mastro	Karissa Lacy
Lindsay Upschulte	Kelly Claffey
James Patras	Ehtasham Ali
Maryam Ebadi	Carol Jaeky
Ben Penachio	Aaron Sellers
Scott Schaefer	Matt Ludolph
John Schoenekase	Thea Hinck
Cheryl Szymanski	Kyle Kania

To our remarkable graduates: you've overcome barriers with courage and determination, and we're honored to have supported your journey—may the skills and confidence you've gained at Donka empower you in every step of your educational, professional, and daily life.

Cassandra Foster

Cassandra worked with Donka Instructor, Ann Byrne, to master JAWS and now confidently uses it in her daily life, along with the Victor Reader Stream and Pearl Camera. She graduated after successfully completing the program! Cassandra then transitioned to Job Placement to gain meaningful employment.



"I'm filled with gratitude towards all who have shared their time and talents in assisting me learn and become more independent with mastering

assistive technology. I've been blessed with the beautiful opportunity of working with Donka, some of the world's most wonderful, smart, and talented people that anyone could ever work with. This experience allowed me to be in a great place in life. Donka, continue doing this great work!"



Empowering Abilities Through Technology

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