We see it at the end of every day. And although Robert Johnson can’t see it, he knows.

Robert can’t see anything. Never has. But being blind hasn’t stopped him from becoming one of the highest producing clients we’ve ever had at Beacon. The staff sees it in the massive 1,500 pound bales of shredded paper stacked and waiting to be shipped out for recycling. Robert knows if he’s done 8 or 9 bales that day. To feed over 13,000 pounds of paper documents into a large shredder really doesn’t require vision—it requires touch... and a good ear.

Robert’s ability to “feel” how fast to feed the forty horsepower shredder — when to “pick up the pace” and when to back off — and his ability to hear when the machine is working too hard, or not enough — is the key to his amazing success. The Beacon shredder can destroy 2,000 pounds of paper an hour. Since taking over the job of feeding the shredder, Robert has steadily increased his proficiency to get to that rate. To get to 100% you have to work fast, but also listen for possible jams that can shut the machine down. Robert has done so well as the shredding feeder that, as of last October, Robert is a full-time staff member of...
I can’t tell you how much time I have been spending on things like building codes, lighting options, change-orders and paint swatches. Then there’s office furnishings, Certificates of Occupancy and floor coverings among a million other details that we’ve had to address during our building expansion this last year. Anybody who has gone through a major construction project — and lived to tell about it — will also tell you the biggest headaches (aside from the costs) are the tons of decisions and choices you’re going to have to make before you’re through.

We were talking about this construction project almost from the moment we merged Tetra Corporation and Beacon Foundation nearly five years ago. We had a million meetings on it, pored over and over the plans, and made lengthy lists of all the things we had to decide during the process. And it still feels like we decided to leave everything up in the air until the last week! Of course, to make these decisions and make the best choices, you have to become an expert in plumbing, flooring, engineering, electricity, landscaping and more. And no matter how much you try to educate yourself and make intelligent, thoughtful decisions, you lie awake at night wondering if you really didn’t blow it anyway.

When I’m all out of ideas and decisions, it really helps me to remember it isn’t about the walls or the floors, or the ceilings or even those gosh-darn permits... as much as it is about the people inside our beautiful new building!

As I think back over the 28-plus years that I have been in Tucson, literally thousands of people came through our doors for services and are now employed throughout the Tucson and Phoenix communities. Many of their names escape me now, but what they overcame to become productive, taxpaying citizens has not. Please allow me to digress a little and share with you just a couple of client stories. One is from a long time ago. The other is fairly recent...

Shortly after arriving at what was then called RWAC (Rehabilitation and Work Adjustment Center) we started doing an intricate assembly for IBM called a “charge corona”. This assembly involved attaching a large number of very fine-gauge wires onto a frame. The work required very fine dexterity skills to attach the wires without breaking them. We had a client named Vickie who was both visually and hearing impaired. Through persistence from her and her supervisors, she learned to do this rather difficult task. In fact, within a year she was our best assembler for the coronas! She later went on to become competitively employed in Colorado where her folks had moved.

Another more recent success story is a client named Larry. Larry has a very hard time sticking to a task. Sitting at a table and doing assembly work wasn’t something we could get Larry to do. Instead, he was assigned various jobs around the facility helping different staff members with cleaning, moving or unloading and loading trucks. But, here again, he would often wander away and the staff would have to find him to get him on task again. Recently it was decided to try him again on assembly work putting together rivets. This time he is being very successful at sticking to his work. In fact, he has progressed so much that they now are considering a placement in the community!

These are just two examples of thousands of successes we have had with training people with disabilities over the years. Yes, buildings are important. And nice new ones are especially important for the people who get to work in them. But in the end, it will be the client successes that make this facility very special.
Beacon — not a client anymore. In addition, in April, Robert was named the 2007 winner of the William Usdane Award at the NISH National Training and Achievement Conference in Los Angeles for “superior performance as an employee in the Ability One Program.”

Robert was born in Florida. He moved to Arizona in 1983 and worked at Arizona Industries for the Blind in Phoenix. With full competitive employment as his eventual goal, he came to Beacon (Tetra) in 1991 to train in the rivet assembly area. Robert’s lack of sight was no real challenge as he doubled, and then tripled, his output of rivets per day. He was promoted to a job at Red Lobster, a community work site, where he wrapped silverware. He became so proficient at this — one set every ten seconds — that he won an award from the company!

After two other community work placements, it was time for Robert’s greatest challenge. Beacon had launched its new shredding enterprise by then and Robert was asked if he would like to try his hand at “feeding” the shredder. The power, speed and noise of the machine would make any sighted person hesitate at pushing mounds of paper into the mouth of that monster. And Robert also wanted to know he couldn’t get his hands caught in the grinding teeth. After he was satisfied it was next to impossible to actually reach the high-speed spinning blades inside the machine, he said he would give it a try.

At first, Robert could only produce two to three shredded bales a day. But, he set goals to get better, and he did. As he got the feel for the process and the pace, his productivity climbed. As Beacon got more and more customers, Robert pushed himself and his machine to go faster. He learned to listen to the shredder, not ask too much of her and just how to push her buttons. Robert and his Allegheny 40-hp paper shredder have become quite the pair. This year they are on pace to shred three million pounds of paper documents!

Saying Robert Johnson is a Beacon success story is an understatement. He’s been successful at every job he’s had here. Saying he is an award-winning valued employee who makes the rest of us look good would be about right. If you could see Robert at his shredding machine every day, you’d believe it.

In a first-of-its-kind study, researchers from DePaul University in Chicago found that employees with disabilities from the healthcare, retail and hospitality sectors were just as dependable and productive as employees without disabilities. In addition, results of the study released earlier this year, showed that costs associated with providing accommodations for workers with disabilities “were often minimal and well worth the expense.”

The study was commissioned by the Chicago Chamber of Commerce with funding provided by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. According to the Executive Summary, in the United States, one of the greatest challenges experienced by individuals with disabilities is employment. Specifically, some employers have misperceptions about the abilities of individuals with disabilities and the costs associated with providing appropriate accommodations for these workers. Understandably, employers are concerned about the bottom line.

These groundbreaking study results contradict many perceptions held by employers about hiring people with disabilities, and show that this pool of workers has much to contribute to helping employers meet current and future workforce demands.
When the ol’ gal started to show her age, she obviously needed a “little work done.” We’re not talking “a nip here” and “tuck there.” She was getting a “total overhaul.” New face. A whole new front! When it’s all over, she’ll be bigger than ever.

It’s taken a whole year and a whole crew of professional people to get her ready. The years had taken a toll on her. Parts of her were over forty years old. She hadn’t had any major work since the ’80s. But now, she’s almost ready for her big comeback!

The all new and improved Beacon — all sixty four thousand square feet of her — is just about ready for her big premiere. No doubt, she’s gonna be a star! More room. More work. More people. All under one roof. A place where those often ignored in society can earn their own way — going from being tax-supported to tax payers. A place we can all show off with pride. A workplace where hundreds of people with disabilities can go from being needy to being needed.

A huge new production floor and “dry room” for special jobs. A big, bright new client break/lunchroom. A large new parking lot with a “round-about” for easy pick-up and drop-off. Expanded paper shredding areas. A beautiful bright new lobby and waiting area. New day-treatment space with a state-of-the-art kitchen for living-skills training. A big workout room with safe exercise equipment for staff and clients. And, new office/meeting space for our growing professional staff. It has taken much more time and money than we originally thought, but boy is it going to be worth it!

Open House celebrations are being planned for October. “Save the Date” information will be sent out in September. And she’ll be BIG... You’ll see (even if it’s hard to tell here because the “pictures” are small)!
The beautiful new Beacon home will be a lasting tribute to all those who have worked at Beacon over the years, as well as those who will get to work there. In the bright new front lobby of the building, we will also be paying tribute to all the generous donors who are helping pay for the new facility. As of right now, there are ninety-seven of them. Combined, they have donated $1,380,000 so far towards our ultimate two million dollar goal.

"We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." —Winston Churchill

Wouldn’t you like to see your name added to that list in our lobby? Maybe you would like to see that of a family member who has benefited — or will benefit — from the services we provide at Beacon. You can help provide a place for thousands of future Tucsonans with disabilities to work and be productive, while paying tribute to a loved one — or just adding your family name to the list of those who made it all possible. Your gift would be tax-deductible and could — possibly — not cost anything! Beacon qualifies for the Arizona Tax Credit for donations up to $400 a year for couples ($200 for individuals.) You could make a $400 donation (even put it on a credit card and get points!) and you could get every penny back on your state tax return. (Please consult with your tax advisor to verify.) And you still could get the Federal deduction — so you actually could come out ahead!

Beacon has established a special donor club called the 100 Rays of Light. It consists of families and friends who have pledged $400 a year for five years to the Dignity of Work Campaign. That’s only $33.33 a month and you could get it back and much more!

We are working to get to 1.5 million dollars raised before we are done with the construction. Can we write your name on the wall with those who are helping us do it?

For more information or to make a donation, please call Patrick McCarthy, Beacon Director of Development (520) 622-4874 ext. 166.

your name here!
THE GIFT THAT KEEPS GIVING!

It’s your birthday. People give you presents, right? It’s not selfish — it’s tradition. All the more surprising when someone does the “giving” to others on their own birthday then. Meet Patti Wylie.

Patti is a Beacon parent. Her son, Sam, has been a client here for the last four years since he graduated from Amphi High School. Patti says Sam “seems very happy at Beacon and very eager to come to work every morning.” Patti and her husband, Doug, have seen Sam become an extremely diligent worker. They are pleased that Sam is thriving at Beacon and adjusting to the world of work.

Patti and Doug Wylie have been annual donors to Beacon Group since Sam started here. In fact, last December they more than doubled their previous year’s donation to Beacon. Then, in February of this year, they accepted an invitation from Patrick McCarthy, Beacon’s Director of Development, to come in for a tour of Beacon’s facility at Oracle and Glenn — including the new building under construction. It was during that meeting that Patti began thinking about her birthday presents. Actually, she started thinking about maybe giving her presents to other people.

Patti and her daughter, Ruth, celebrate their birthdays at the same time each year. They throw a joint party for friends and family. While touring Beacon, Patti came up with the idea to ask the people invited to their birthday party to consider a donation to Beacon in lieu of presents. “We wanted to make our celebration more meaningful by giving our friends and family an opportunity to help this most worthwhile group that has served Sam so well.”

Right after Patti and her daughter mailed out a letter with their birthday wish and a Beacon brochure, the gifts started coming in. Over the next month and a half they kept coming — sixty-two donations in all!

Close to $4,000 was donated to Beacon by Patti’s and Ruth’s family and friends. Then Patti’s husband, Doug, sent in his own check to make it an even $5,000 donated in honor of his wife and daughter.

“We were overwhelmed,” said Patti. “At first, we were going to suggest a gag gift. When we asked our friends and family to make a donation to the Beacon Group, the amounts they gave pleased us so much. Our entire family is grateful and appreciative for their generous support.”

A cake with candles, balloons and party favors... $100. Asking your friends and family to give a gift to Beacon instead of to you... $5,000. Helping hundreds of people with disabilities to find the tools to move from dependency to independence... priceless!
Dana Holt admits she was afraid and kind of intimidated when she first started at Beacon four years ago. “I was really aware of people’s disabilities and tried to do everything for them. That was a mistake. They are just like anybody else — the clients want to do things for themselves.” She came to realize the secret of Beacon: Clients need to struggle, and fail, and to learn at their own pace. They are here for training. “I found out quickly, our clients don’t want or need to be coddled.”

Before coming to Beacon, Dana had been a sales rep for a wireless communication company here in Tucson. She also worked in daycare and a group home for abused and neglected children. Her first position at Beacon was as a One-to-One Trainer. She worked with one client with severe behavioral challenges. She had to provide constant attention and intense training to a client who was unable to follow a task, suffered from emotional outbursts, and could — when stressed — be a threat to harm herself or others. Through Dana’s steady support, her client went from earning less than $20.00 every two weeks to making over $100.00.

In December of last year, Dana became the Lead Rehabilitation Supervisor for Beacon. Her job is to facilitate and coordinate communication between our rehabilitation program and business production. This was a brand new position, but once again Dana was not afraid to accept the challenge and increased responsibility. Chuck Tiller, Beacon’s Vice President of Rehabilitation Services, says that “Dana has been instrumental in organizing the production floor, and ensuring the effective and efficient flow of work for our business customers.”

Dana has learned to face her fears. “I have a new grandson with a rare disability,” she says. That helps me appreciate my work and understand what families have to endure and learn to accept as just a part of life. Everyone wants what’s best for their child. I love my job,” Dana adds. “I love that people trust me with their son or daughter.”

The clients can feel safer with Dana in her new role. As structure eases the stress, then their fear can give way to fun.

Grant enables new laundry operation at Value Village

The Casas Adobes Rotary Club of Tucson has led an effort to donate two industrial washers and two large-capacity dryers to Beacon’s Value Village operation. The money — a total of $16,000 — is actually coming from seven Rotary Clubs, including the Oro Valley Club, three clubs from Mexico, one from Lebanon and one from Brazil. Their combined donations are being matched by a grant from Rotary International to make up the full amount.

The washers and dryers will be used to equip our new laundry at the new Beacon Annex building at 2700 N. Stone (the old Skate Country building). This is where Value Village now does all daily intake of donated items. Every day, the Value Village trucks pick up many truckloads of items from all over the city. Much of it is donated clothing, bedding, or other fabric items. In the past, if these items were dirty, we had no way to clean them and had to just throw them away. Now, with the new equipment, we will be able to clean these items and increase our saleable inventory at Value Village.

In addition to the increased sales, having this equipment will enable us to set up a working laundry as an additional training program for our clients. Under the supervision of a Job Coach, clients will operate the laundry and train for a possible job someday with a local laundry business or hotel.
Soon after Beacon’s newly-designed website “went live” in October 2006, we were averaging 1,600 visits per month. But, from April through July of this year, we’ve been averaging an astounding 7,800 unique visitors a month! If you’re not one of those thousands of folks checking out our website on a regular basis... you’re missing a lot! Here are some highlights:

- **Link to a 5-minute video on Beacon’s shredding business from KUAT Channel 6’s “Arizona Illustrated”**
- **Donate Online! Secure link to make contributions online**
- **Link to the all-new Beacon Secure website**
- **View the Arizona Daily Star article (6/5/2008) promoting Beacon’s growth and progress**
- **Current sales & specials at Value Village Thrift Store**
- **Link to the all-new website for Tetra Services in Phoenix**
- **Quarterly Performance Improvement Reports for Beacon’s programs in Tucson and Phoenix**