ost people would not think getting a phone call from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to be good news — especially when they are calling to tell you they want to see you. However, Beacon client, Kelly Topping, had been hoping and praying to get that very call. Last November she did hear from the IRS, and they did want her to come see them. Actually, they had some good news for Kelly.

The IRS office in Phoenix was calling Kelly to tell her she had passed all her background checks and that she needed to come in and pick up her employee I.D. badge to start her new job in their mailroom. Kelly called Beacon’s Employment Specialist, Jessica Hardemon, to tell her the good news. Instead, all she could do was cry over the phone.

This job meant so much to Kelly, and it had been a long hard road to get it. Jessica had been doing job development with Kelly for eight months, but Kelly had been trying to get back into the work force for ten years. Like most of the many thousands of people Beacon has helped over the years, Kelly has dealt with real disabilities, serious challenges and painful losses in her life. But, in spite of the odds, she wanted to work again. She felt she had lost her identity and wanted to find her old self again.

Kelly’s challenges began at a young age. When she was fourteen, her father lost his job. Their family moved from New York to Arizona so he could look for work. After she graduated from high school, Kelly got a job at Samaritan Health Services (now Banner Health). She got married and had three children. Kelly was finding her way in life, but more challenges were still to come.

In 2000, Kelly started having mental health issues. She was eventually diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder. Her husband was having his own battles with depression. Eventually they got divorced. Not long after that, Kelly broke her back and could no longer work. After two back surgeries and rehabilitation, Kelly was feeling very low and lost in her life.
For the first time in 37 years this message is coming from somebody new! I am honored to be the new President of Beacon Group.

I first want to thank Steve King, who has put his heart and soul into Beacon Group for those past 37 years. Thanks, Steve, for your leadership, dedication, mentoring, hard work and for the Beacon Group you leave with your legacy.

I am not all new since I have been with Beacon Group for over eight years. Previously, I served as Vice President of Business Operations here. Before that I had many general manager roles with manufacturing companies and also served for over five years on the Board of Directors for the Peoria Production Shop, a Community Rehabilitation Agency in Illinois.

I love our mission here at Beacon Group. In my professional life, there has been nothing more rewarding than meeting people with disabilities who are successfully working on a Beacon Group contract or on a job we helped them find with another organization. We don’t just get people on their feet, we help them achieve the satisfaction of contributing to society through work.

I also love the Beacon Group community. Our Board of Directors is supportive to all, our staff is dedicated to the mission, and we all strive to give great service to our customers. We accept, support and provide opportunities for many who, under the same circumstances, would not otherwise have been able to enjoy the success they have achieved.

Beacon continues to do amazing things for people with disabilities. You will read today about some of our wonderful work in Phoenix, Fort Huachuca, Tucson and Hill Air Force Base, both the services our team has provided directly to people with disabilities and the work opportunities for people with disabilities our team has found.

We will continue and grow our mission for many years to come. I look forward to working closely with all of you as we begin this new chapter at Beacon Group.
Kelly says she was, “just sitting at home in a very dark environment. I had to reach out and network with other people.” She went to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) for help. They referred her to Beacon in Phoenix last March and she began working with Jessica Hardemon.

Jessica began working with Kelly and had her begin on Beacon’s Community Work Crew at Starmaker Video. This temporary placement helped Kelly show her great attitude and positive work ethic. Last summer, when Beacon got a contract to provide staffing in the IRS mailroom, Jessica suggested that Kelly apply for a permanent job as the Site Supervisor.

Kelly got the job, but first had to pass background checks and a security clearance. That process can take a lot of time. While she was waiting, Kelly helped out at other jobs for Beacon clients. However, the longer she waited, the more anxious she became. After a couple of months, Kelly was losing hope in ever getting her new job. Luckily, she finally got that call she was waiting for. All her clearances came through and she started her new job in November.

As the new Site Supervisor, Kelly supervises two other Beacon clients working in the Mailroom at the IRS. They are responsible for handling, sorting, shipping and distribution of all mail. She loves her job and the people she works with at the IRS. She also still keeps in touch with Jessica at Beacon who continues to provide advice and counseling. This helps Kelly with adjustment challenges with the new job.

Many of the people that Beacon works with find that the working relationship with a professional job developer, like Jessica, to be a crucial part of the process of finding and keeping a job. Especially for people dealing with disabilities, the work itself is usually not the biggest challenge. Comfort levels, anxiety, self-confidence, adapting to change, handling stress, learning new things and updating skills can all be much more of a threat than hard work. Kelly knew she had been a hard worker, but she worried that her setbacks and having to contend with disabilities had undermined her confidence and “can do” attitude.

Working with Jessica helped Kelly find her belief in herself and strong work ethic again. It helped her find her love of work and remember how it made her feel. It helped her find her way back in the world of work. She had lost that during her dark times, but now she has found her “calling” with the IRS.

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Dave Johnson joined Beacon on February 20th as our new Vice President of Business Operations.

Dave comes to Beacon with an extensive background in business management. He began his career in sales, but soon joined the marketing team of one of the largest consumer products companies in the world, Newell/Rubbermaid (now known as Newell Brands). He left Newell to lead the personal care products business for another consumer products company, Sunbeam/Oster. After two years at the household products manufacturer, Dave was recruited back to Newell where he became Vice President of Marketing for one of their largest divisions.

In 2002, Dave left Newell to lead the marketing efforts for Rain Bird Corporation, which entailed moving away from his native state of Illinois, eventually settling in Tucson in 2005. Dave remained a part of the Rain Bird executive team until 2013 when he started his own business. Dave sold his business three years later but wished to stay in Tucson and find a new challenge that enabled him to utilize his business expertise, while also giving back to the community he now calls home.

Originally from Rockford, Illinois, Dave graduated from the University of Illinois in 1989. He and his wife Liz have been married for nearly 27 years and they have two daughters, Kate and Becka. Liz works for the Arizona Poison Control Center and is a certified yoga teacher. Kate is a registered nurse and works for SinfoniaRX. Becka is currently studying to be a nurse, attending UofA. Dave and Liz have a dog named Pearl and a tortoise named Wanda.

In his spare time Dave loves a good game of poker or off-roading in the Arizona desert. Welcome, Dave!
Beacon Group’s newest referral source is Cenpatico Integrated Care, the Managed Care Organization (MCO) serving persons with a serious mental illness in southern Arizona counties. Since initially contracting with them about a year and a half ago, the numbers of Cenpatico members served has increased significantly.

Beacon Group provides Psychoeducational Services (Pre-Job Training and Development) for clients. This service prepares a person to engage in meaningful work-related activities and may include: career/educational counseling, job shadowing, assistance in the use of educational resources, training in résumé preparation, job interview skills, study skills, work activities, professional decorum and dress, time management, and assistance in finding employment. Beacon Group is currently serving 48 clients.

We also provide Ongoing Support to Maintain Employment, intended to enable a person to complete job training or maintain employment. Services may include monitoring and supervision, assistance in performing job tasks, work-adjustment training, and supportive counseling.

Here are three recent client stories from this program...

April started at Beacon Group in July 2015 working with our custodial crew and assisting with administrative tasks. At first, April was working several days per week and she was also working with our Employment Specialist to begin looking for work in the community. April continued to show how much she enjoyed working with the other members of her crew but knew she needed full-time employment. When a full-time position became available as a job coach on the custodial crew, April knew this was for her. April worked consistently with her Employment Specialist and other members of her team to prepare for her interview. April is now a job coach with the evening custodial crew with plans to continue learning and growing to become certified to work with behavioral health clients.

Jean is a 63-year-old woman who has two associate degrees in Liberal Arts and Computer Information Science. After an accident that broke her hip, Jean was unable to continue her home-based business. She became homeless and lived in her car for 6 months. Jean then began working with our Employment Specialist to find part time work. She applied for a position with Southwest Gas and was hired! Now, Jean has an apartment and was even able to have her cats come back to live with her.

Michael is 36 years old. Michael joined Beacon Group in landscaping in October 2016. Michael started working just 3 hours per day. He was basically homeless — living in a house which had been condemned. As Michael’s endurance and tolerance improved he was able to increase his hours working to 30 hours per week. Michael now is able to afford his own apartment and maintain his housing. He is working with Beacon’s Employment Specialist to find a full time job.

Beacon’s Pre-Job Training and Development efforts prepare individuals to engage in meaningful work-related activities.
Beacon obtained a Total Facilities Management (TFM) contract with Hill Air Force Base just outside Salt Lake City in October 2015. The contract requires that 75% of the twenty-three employees hired must have a disability that hinders their ability to find work. This contract, like others that Beacon has, is administered through the AbilityOne Program.

Rafferty Bennett, Beacon’s Site Supervisor at Hill AFB, recently informed us that two of their employees received special recognition for their outstanding work. Beacon employees Hal Christensen and Tim Ingle had received a Certificate of Recognition with a Commemorative Pin from their Squadron Director, Shane Olsen, for their great work in support of the squadron.

The 533rd Squadron at Hill AFB is a support unit for the B2 Bomber. They perform testing, maintenance and other stuff they are not allowed to talk about on the B2. A special Security Clearance is required to work in parts of the facility. Tim and Hal are part of the crew that maintains things like floors, lights and general repairs.

Tim has worked on the Beacon team for a year. Hal was hired a year and a half ago. They both had good work histories before coming to Hill AFB. Unfortunately, they also had a serious disability that had changed their lives and made work almost impossible to find …until Beacon gave them another chance.

Hal Christensen had worked as a meat cutter for twenty-five years. He then worked in maintenance for a hotel that was the host for the Winter Olympics in 2002. But, Hal also had Type 1 Diabetes, and it was taking a toll on his health. He eventually had a stroke at age forty, which ended his ability to work. Determined to beat his Diabetes, Hal had a double organ transplant. With a new pancreas and new kidney, Hal wanted to work again. He registered with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), and began the long process that finally led him to Beacon.

Tim Ingle worked for thirteen years as a metal finisher for a company called Aerospace Engineering and Support. At one point, he was a Shop Manager. They did a lot of work for the Air Force that Tim says he is not allowed to discuss. About fifteen years ago, he began to notice a weakness in his right hand and knew something was wrong. In 2010, he was diagnosed with Parkinson’s Disease.

In spite of the seriousness of his challenges, like Hal, he still wanted to work. “Beacon was the only one to give me a chance,” says Tim. Now, he works three hours a day, but he says he starts getting pretty tired after that. He plans to keep working as long as he can. "I do my best”, he says, “It feels good to do something to help America. I’ve never been acknowledged for work before.”

Both Tim and Hal are married and have grown children. They are both great examples of people who, unexpectedly, had to deal with the challenges of a serious disability later in life, and how the will to stay productive can keep you going if given the chance. Hal even wrote a book about his journey. It is titled, “Yes Virginia, There Is A Cure For Diabetes.”

Tim Ingle and Hal Christensen are two people who have overcome a lot, thanks to that inner spirit that says, “Why stay down on the ground, when you can fly!?"
During our annual Holiday Dinner Party and Dance celebration in December, Beacon Group recognized the staff, clients, businesses and community leaders that made 2016 yet another noteworthy success. We’d like to express our gratitude and congratulations to all of our proud recipients and winners!

During the event, Beacon clients made a very special, heartfelt presentation to outgoing Beacon President and CEO Steve King honoring his 37 years of leadership to our organization (pictured below). They gave Steve a special plaque with a duplicate of a paver stone dedicated to Steve that will be placed at the base of the flag pole in front of Beacon’s main facility in Tucson.

The two plaques read: “For Steven King in appreciation for 37 years of opportunities he created. — From the clients”
New Community Worksite “Kicks In”!

Last year, Beacon added the City of Gilbert as a new Community Worksite in the Phoenix area. We provided a crew of two clients and a Job Coach to the Street Maintenance Department, to help with City property cleanup. In March, we added a second crew of two clients for the City’s Soccer Complex.

Like the crew with Street Maintenance, the new team will help clean and maintain the Soccer Complex, remove trash and debris, sweep, rake and service trash bins.

These jobs out in the community help our clients adjust to the real world of work and develop valuable skills and attitudes to maintain employment. Other Community Worksites in the Phoenix area include the IRS (see our cover story), the Federal Building, the Bureau of Reclamation, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Waste Management and Starmaker DVD. Together, they employ almost twenty people with disabilities.