

Employee "thrilled" to finally have chance to prove herself



By Brock Weir

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, Kerry Grieco sits down at her new desk and goes through her tasks for the morning.

It might be sorting through documents or preparing files for important clients, but it's work. And, most importantly for Kerry and her parents, it is work that needs to be done.

Earlier this summer, Ms. Grieco, 31, shared her story of her struggle to find employment in the Aurora area after an attempt to get a job as a dishwasher at an east Aurora Swiss Chalet led to disappointment ? and anger from her parents.

When Ms. Greico was 18, she was diagnosed with a brain tumour. The subsequent surgeries, radiation and chemotherapy left her with mental and physical challenges including some weakness on her right side and short term memory loss.

But, through hard work and determination, she has recovered far beyond initial expectations, holds down a job as a dish washer at Aurora's Panera Bread and is an active volunteer at community organizations like the Aurora Seniors' Centre.

She faced a bump on the road, applying for a similar position at an east Aurora Swiss Chalet when the franchise owner told Kerry she didn't think she would be up for the job. This left Ms. Greico feeling passed over and not given a shot at the position without a chance to prove her ability.

It's a story that is not unique to people sharing Kerry's challenges, but when she and her father went public with the story, it lead to an outpouring of similar cases ? and some golden opportunities.

Her Tuesday and Thursday gig is now at a desk in the office of Aurora realtor Wasim Jarrah. Mr. Jarrah, a resident of Newmarket ? and a Council candidate in their upcoming Ward 5 bi-election ? is a realtor at Royal LePage Your Community Realty on Yonge Street just north of Edward Street.

Having heard Kerry's story, Mr. Jarrah reached out with an opportunity.

?Wasim led the charge,? says Kerry's father, Bill Hogg. ?One thing I wanted to be perfectly clear right from the get go is that, in our minds, this shouldn't be charity. My key questions were: is there work there you would have Kerry do that, if he didn't do, someone else would have to do? In other words: legitimate work that adds value to the organization.

?Once I was convinced that was the case, then I was obviously thrilled and delighted. Kerry is delighted too. First of all, for her, it is

the feeling she is actually making a contribution and that is really important to her, and the fact that people are nice to her and treat her like everyone else. She has a job to do, she is expected to do it, she shows up on time, leaves on time and gets paid. It is pretty normal stuff and she is thrilled to be able to do that. She hasn't had as much opportunity to do that in the past.?

There is no reason, in Mr. Jarrah's mind, why those opportunities aren't around every corner.

?I think that is the problem we have in society right now where you take someone that I don't believe she has a disability. I think that she has a special ability that people have to recognize and appreciate it as well,? says Mr. Jarrah, an active member of the Rotary Club of Newmarket. ?Through Rotary, we also have a program called Rotary at Work where we take people with special abilities and find them meaningful employment.

?I have been monitoring what is happening there and I have been looking for someone that has that special ability to come in and assist me because of their work ethics. They have very strong work ethics, and I think it was proven in the States with Walgreens in their distribution centre where their efficiency went up and they cut back on sick days, and it proved to be profitable for them as a business, but also fulfilling for them to give these people with special abilities the opportunity to feel like they are part of society and part of the business world as well.?

Since speaking out, Ms. Greico's story was shared widely, perhaps resonating, Mr. Hogg says, because it is a story everyone can relate to: ?being outright rejected without having been given the opportunity to try.?

It has touched many people and raised dialogue, but it is dialogue which should be raised even more, he says. Since going public, Kerry's dance card is filling up nicely. Taking on a new opportunity for two further shifts at Starbucks on Bayview Avenue, she now has a shift every weekday at her three jobs. While Kerry's packed schedule has made her parents' schedules packed as well, it's a welcome problem for all concerned.

?It is a win-win for society, it is a win-win situation for business, and it is a win-win situation for the individual that is hiring,? says Mr. Jarrah. ?There is nothing more fulfilling for me than when I see her come in and we just start talking and having fun and you see she is appreciative of the fact there is an opportunity out there for her and I just want her to feel like any other person.

?I strongly encourage businesses to hire people with special abilities if they want to take their business to another level and be more profitable because these people with special abilities rarely call in sick. When they come in, they have a very strong work ethic.?

Adds Mr. Hogg: ?Any good business would tell you they want to keep it diversified so Kerry will have three little jobs and she is pretty excited about it. It gives her exposure to three different worlds, so she is thrilled.?