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## Unique workers, employers share morale boost



**Stephen Bryant, president of Stevenson and Hunt Insurance Brokers, praises the effect Heather Guthrie, hired through Community Living London, has had on the company. (DEREK RUTTAN, London Free Press)**

### THE CITY

By IAN GILLESPIE, THE LONDON FREE PRESS

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She's polite. She's pleasant. And she happily answers my questions as best she can. But I can tell by the way she keeps glancing at her watch, that Heather Guthrie is getting anxious.

And who can blame her?

After all, it's nearly 3:30 p.m., there's less than an hour left in her shift and there's still plenty of work to do.

But working as an office clerk at the downtown offices of Stevenson and Hunt Insurance Brokers is more than just a job for Heather.

It's opportunity. It's independence. It's about learning skills, developing interests, finding friends and making a contribution.

"That job is absolutely wonderful for her," says her father Bill Guthrie. "It's great for her morale and for her ability to appreciate herself and have self-confidence. . . . It's what she does. It's her whole routine."

Heather puts it in simpler terms.

"I love my job," she says.

Heather is one of about 80 intellectually disabled individuals who have found work with the help of the employment services division of Community Living London (CLL), which is holding its A Night of Heroes fundraiser on Thursday.

Heather, who has Down syndrome, started working at Stevenson and Hunt nearly five years ago. Every Monday through Friday from 12:20 till 4:20 p.m., the 26-year-old London woman collects, sorts, weighs and posts the mail, organizes the courier deliveries, loads the printers with paper, cleans the kitchen and makes coffee.

But you quickly sense it's the people -- not all that paper -- that make the big difference.

"They're really, really nice," Heather says of her co-workers. "They're always around when I feel sad or something."

Sheila Appleton is Heather's job coach at CLL. In the beginning, Appleton rode the bus with Heather to make sure she knew the route. And she checks in now and then to, as she says, smooth out any "little bumps" that might arise.

Appleton acknowledges workers placed through CLL are uniquely dedicated and dependable. But it's more than that.

"It's just the morale they bring to the workplace," says Appleton. "They just give their all when they're there."

Heather's boss agrees.

"She has an outstanding work ethic," says Stevenson and Hunt president and chief executive Stephen Bryant. "You can tell by her seriousness today -- she has to get the courier (delivery) out. Heather fully understands her responsibilities."

But even during a brief visit to the company's offices in Citi Plaza, it's clear the insurance company gets as much from this arrangement as Heather. Maybe more.

"She brings a great dimension to Stevenson and Hunt that we otherwise wouldn't have without her," says Bryant. "And I think it causes us to think in much bigger terms and from bigger perspectives. We certainly are better people, I think, for having Heather work with us."

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### **If you go**

**What:** A Night of Heroes, a fundraising fashion show and silent auction for Community Living London

**When:** Thursday; doors open 6 p.m., show starts at 7 p.m.

**Where:** Best Western Lamplighter Inn (591 Wellington Rd.)

**Tickets:** \$45 each; call 519-686-3000 (ext. 334) or e-mail [nightofheroes@cll.on.ca](mailto:nightofheroes@cll.on.ca)

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