



## The Faces of HMEA - August 2006

**Marc Page** was hired as the very first job coach at HMEA. He began his job coaching at the Living Earth Health Store in Worcester. Marc's been with HMEA for 18 years. During this time, he's worked at Grand Industries in Worcester, in Sutton, and in Sterling. He now works in Clinton. Some of the places where Marc has supported people to work are the Recycling Center in Fitchburg, Monty's Garden Restaurant in Leominster (one of the longest supported employment jobs at HMEA), Atlantic Union College, and Mail Systems Management. He has been instrumental at the Worcester County Foodbank, and helped establish a swimming program at the YMCA.

Recently, Marc was honored at the DMR Central/West and Central Region Citizen Advisory Boards' legislative breakfast. In his acceptance speech, he described his life, his many jobs, and his philosophy about working with people with developmental disabilities.

"When I applied to work at HMEA about 18 years ago, I arrived at my interview carrying a wide and varied resume. I had lived through much of the 60s as a hippie, living in San Francisco and on the road. I went to Woodstock as a drug counselor, I worked for a time as a lumberjack, I owned my own restaurant, and worked as a staff person for many years at a residential treatment center for emotionally disturbed boys. I worked for ten years as a caretaker at an elementary school, as well as nine years as a captain in the local Volunteer Fire Department. I was elected or appointed to many town boards including the Conservation Commission, Town Energy Commis-



sion, as a Constable and as a Special Police Officer. I'm not so sure why HMEA took a chance hiring me, because I clearly can't hold a job!

Since 1990, I have run a large farm involved in breeding and selling llamas. In my spare time, I have a business that involves traveling around New England shearing and training llamas. I have recently become interested in

using livestock as pet therapy at nursing homes and within the special needs population. I work the livestock shows each fall at The Big E (New England States Fair) as a superintendent. I am also involved in large animal rescue and sanctuary for abused animals.

What in all this prepared me to be an effective job coach?

I like to think all of it together. I love to learn, and to do, and then to teach others. I try to share my many experiences with the people I support. It is not enough for me to just teach job skills. That's the easy part. It is very important to help them foster interests in other aspects of the work experience, such as taking an interest in the lives of their co-workers, and taking advantage of every opportunity that arises from working in the community.

I am also fortunate to work for an agency that allows me to utilize all my life experiences in my job. I think it speaks well of HMEA that they still have the first job coach they hired. I have the privilege of working with a professional and caring group of co-workers who also share their unique view of life." ◀

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*Thanks to Marc Page for his wonderful words, and to Doug MacPherson, Diversity Committee member, who provided the photo and HMEA information.*