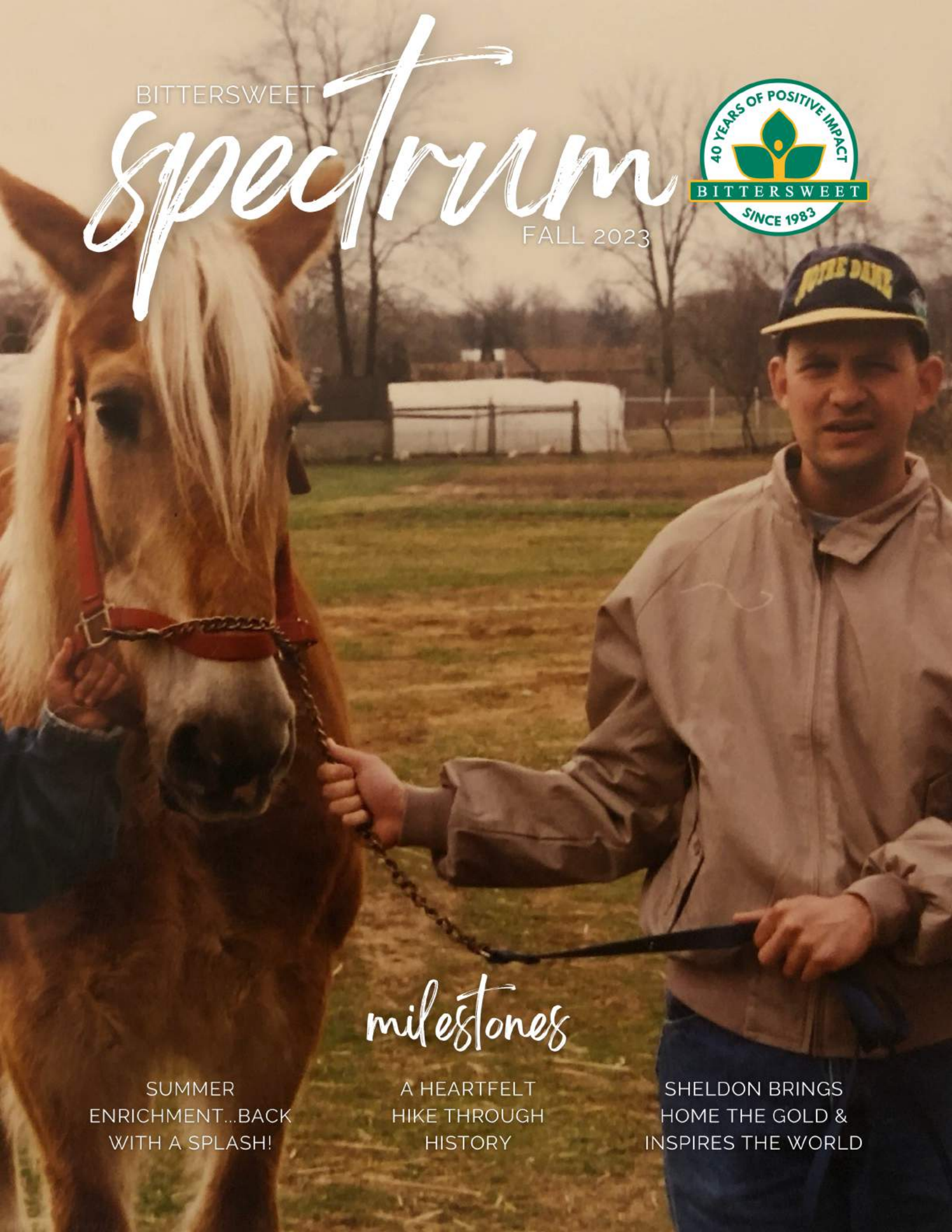


BITTERSWEET

Spectrum

FALL 2023



milestones

SUMMER
ENRICHMENT...BACK
WITH A SPLASH!

A HEARTFELT
HIKE THROUGH
HISTORY

SHELDON BRINGS
HOME THE GOLD &
INSPIRES THE WORLD

From Dustin's Desk

Dear Bittersweet Community Members, Friends, and Supporters,

Warm greetings and happy autumn! While the summer of 2023 has come to an end, the turning of the seasons calls upon us once again to reflect on the year thus far, and prepare for the ventures that lie ahead. In the spirit of this transition, we are thrilled to share with you in these pages a glimpse of the remarkable gifts, strides, and accomplishments of our amazing participants, and the hard work and determination they have put forth in order to achieve them.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of Bittersweet Farms, and four decades of positively impacting the lives of individuals with autism, and those whose lives they touch. This milestone, and the milestones you will witness in these stories and countless others, stands as a testament to the effectiveness of our support model, the talent and dedication of our team members, the compassionate support of our community, and the daily inspiration and joy that our participants provide to keep us all focused, fueled, and enriched along the journey.

Another core element to our success is our unwavering focus on the positives, and always "watering the flowers and not the weeds" as we often say. Giving our attention and efforts to capabilities, growth, and understanding, we have harvested exponentially more in return. Regardless of how, I sincerely thank you for being a part of this magical process, and helping us cultivate the potential of the people we support and the possibilities they can obtain.

In the tapestry of the Bittersweet Community, your contribution has been, and will always be, essential to our mission.

With heartfelt gratitude,



Dustin

Then  now





Summer Enrichment... Back with a Splash!

Following a hiatus due to COVID-19, the beloved Summer Enrichment Program for adolescents with autism returned to our Whitehouse location in 2023! The campers made a splash both in the pool and in the Bittersweet Community with their smiles, excitement, and joy!

For more than 20 seasons, the Summer Enrichment Program has offered a wide range of activities both on-site at Bittersweet and in the local community. The program fostered positive impact for our campers by providing familiar structure and routine through the summer, which is crucial for individuals with autism.

The Summer Enrichment Program in Whitehouse served 13 participants in 2023. Highlights included community outings to the Toledo Zoo & Aquarium, Metroparks Toledo, Imagination Station, and various activities on the Farm, such as crafts, games, and swimming. These experiences nurture participants' social skills, sensory integration, independence, and confidence to navigate life in all its splendor.

Program Services Director, Abby Ritzman, said, "It was so wonderful to see the participants enjoying activities in the community through structured

supports. The program is also designed to assist the students in interacting with peers, paving the way for social skill building and establishing new friendships!"

Julie Arnold, whose son Jack attended Summer Enrichment this year for the first time, shared these words of gratitude: "This has been my son's best summer ever! Thank you from the bottom of my heart for making this possible for him. Your work means the world."

In addition to the Summer Enrichment Program in Whitehouse, the Extended School Year (ESY) Program in Pemberville served 12 students in 2023. Highlights included community outings to the Toledo Zoo & Aquarium, bowling, and local parks.

We asked some of the Pemberville participants about their favorite summer memories. Picnics at the park were Josh's favorite, while the highlight of Ben's summer was playing with Play-Doh, an excellent activity for sensory input! As it turns out, when it comes to summer fun, sometimes the simplest joys are the most magical.



A Heartfelt Hike Through History



Tammy Bolley-Chambers arrived at Bittersweet Farms in December 1985, just two and a half years after our founding in June 1983. Tammy remains our longest tenured employee, with 37 years of service to the Bittersweet mission. To celebrate our 40th anniversary, we sat down with Tammy for a hike down the trails of Bittersweet history.

How did you learn about Bittersweet Farms?

A high school friend of mine was working at Bittersweet and told me that I would love this job and that he felt I had a lot to give. Some of my friends growing up had disabilities, but I didn't know anything about autism specifically. He was so encouraging and said, "It doesn't matter-- they will teach you."

What were your earliest impressions of the Farm?

I was immediately impressed because the work here was so meaningful and purposeful. From the beginning, I understood my role in the lives of the participants, and I was honored to work here and have the chance to impact their lives. I also loved that hiking in the woods, caring for animals, and gardening were activities I was already actively involved in. Above all, I was drawn to supporting people, and that is what has kept me here all these years.

When did you realize this would be a long-term career and community for you?

Truthfully, I never made a conscious decision to establish a career here; I just prioritized my relationships with the participants and my role in their lives, and the rest came naturally. I have worn many hats and have had many different titles over the years, but who I am and my relationship with the people we support has never changed.

How has Bittersweet changed you?

Working at Bittersweet, I have learned to see things through many different lenses. Getting to know the participants so intimately over the years has enabled me to see the world through each of their perspectives. Understanding how they see and experience the world, especially as they navigate and overcome struggles, has made it possible for me to support each and every one of them with more dignity.

The people here have changed me. We have literally grown up together. I was 23 when I started working here, and the founding residents were 18-26 at the time. Many of them are still here today, and over the last 40 years, we have all matured, grown, and become close friends.

Then  now





Tell us about how the participants' growth has inspired you over the years.

Reflecting back, I can see so much progress in each participant's life, especially in the seemingly small things. I think of how anxious Steve (pictured with Tammy on previous page) was years ago and how he has grown in his ability to self-regulate and relax. I think about how it feels when a participant who is sensitive to touch chooses to shake your hand because they have grown comfortable with doing so.

In addition to these everyday moments, I think of the multiple individuals who have overcome life-threatening health diagnoses, defying the odds not only to live but to thrive here at the Farm. There is really something remarkable about the holistic nature of the farmstead model and their lives are proof of its power.

What are some of your favorite memories from the last 40 years?

There are too many to count, but one of my favorite memories from the early days was one of the infamous Saturday 10-mile hikes with our founder, Bettye Ruth Kay.

I used to work double shifts every Saturday, and Bettye would often work on Saturdays and lead the hikes. She was a hands-on leader and took pride in her knowledge of the trails through Oak Openings, but on this particular day, she lost her way while leading the group. We ended up circling back to the same spot three times, adding on an extra mile with each loop. The fourth time we came around to the same spot, she finally looked at me with a smile and said, "Okay, Tammy, which way do we go?"

I will always remember that day, because although I had known the right way all along, I respected and trusted Bettye's leadership so much that I had remained quiet and followed. When she turned to me for guidance, I felt the respect and trust were mutual.

From your experience, how has Bittersweet changed the local community and the world?

From the beginning, we have cultivated a positive relationship with the local community and they have always supported us in return by volunteering, attending events, and donating crucial funding. That said, our impact is also national and global. Every week, I receive calls from people all over the country and world who have heard of Bittersweet Farms, are in need of a place like ours, and are longing to replicate our model to serve their family members and communities.

People all over the world have founded farmstead programs inspired by their visits and their interactions with us. It would be impossible to quantify this impact on the world. We have given the gift of hope to countless individuals, families, and providers by sharing guidance and helping them to feel less alone.

Anything else you would like to share?

To our donors: thank you. You could never imagine how much your support impacts the lives of our participants. You have created opportunities for them that would otherwise not exist, and you have provided wonderful experiences to enhance their lives. They are forever grateful.

**GIVE
TODAY!**



*Scan the QR code or visit
www.bittersweetfarms.org*



A Colorful Dream 40 Years in the Making



Steve and Jimmy in Bettye Ruth Kay's classroom.



Steve perfecting his painting skills as a young adult.



Steve's painting nook in the Creative Arts Studio.



Steve's recent solo art exhibition at Toledo Library.

When you walk through the doors of the Bittersweet Creative Arts Studio, one thing is guaranteed: you will find Steve in his corner painting nook. He spends his days there creating, surrounded by the sound of his favorite music, gallery walls covered with his bold, colorful paintings, and his beloved tea station a few short steps away.

Steve was one of the students in Bittersweet founder Bettye Ruth Kay's classroom. More than 40 years ago, Steve and Bettye Ruth's other students inspired her to dream bigger and build a place where her students' future dreams could become realities. As one of our first residents, Steve has called Bittersweet "home" for four decades, and for all those years, he has been one of the core creative forces at the Farm.

Over the years, art has been Steve's singular focus, and he has dedicated his life to painting in particular. His medium of choice is acrylic on canvas, and he loves to paint animals of all kinds. His first choice is "owls," followed by a trio of farmstead favorites: "cows, pigs...and ducks!" This year, Steve's decades of dedication paid off with an invitation from the Toledo Lucas County Public Library for a solo art exhibition at the Sanger Branch featuring a commissioned series of owl paintings.

Steve spent the winter months studying different types of owls in preparation for his exhibition. In the spring, he painted all different kinds of owls, from barn owls to snowy owls. Finally, in June, Steve spread his wings, sharing his works of art with the community through a month-long exhibition at the Sanger Branch.

Bittersweet Creative Arts Specialist, Melanie Sears, shared that this exhibition was not only a dream come true for Steve, but a vehicle for his growth. "It was wonderful to watch Steve's independence evolve through this project and to empower him to take initiative in deciding what to paint, the medium, colors, and design. This is what individualized, person-centered care and support looks like, and I'm so glad he was able to experience this special recognition of his talent and hard work."

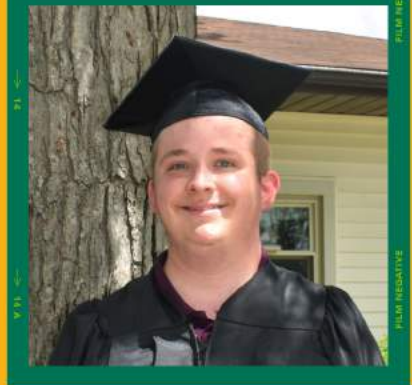
Best of all, when the Bittersweet Creative Arts Team visited Steve's exhibition together, Steve wasn't the only one whose pride was evident; his fellow artists beamed with joy to see their friend's work recognized in the community. More than 40 years later, Steve is still inspiring big dreams, this time as a role model for his peers, igniting their passion for art and demonstrating the magnitude of what is possible.

CONGRATS!!

Congratulations to our 2023 Special Olympics medalists!



Congratulations to the 2023 graduates of the Bittersweet Pemberville Transition Program!



Sheldon Brings Home the Gold and Inspires the World

Sheldon might be one of the newest participants at Betty's Farm, but his impact is already far-reaching.

Sheldon joined the Day Program at Bittersweet at Betty's Farm in Lima in 2022. Day Program Manager, Jerry Hunt (pictured with Sheldon at right), shared that when Sheldon visited Betty's Farm for the first time, one thing stood out— his million dollar smile. Sheldon was eager to be a part of everything he observed at Betty's Farm, and when he arrived, he dove right in!



After a year of learning and growing at Betty's Farm, Jerry said that Sheldon has blossomed. "The program has allowed him to experience new things. He was shy when he arrived at Betty's Farm, but now he loves volunteering, competing in Special Olympics, and going on community outings. He is happier and more confident." In Sheldon's own words, "I go to Betty's Farm. I love it!"

Two of Sheldon's favorite activities are bowling and mini golf, and over the last year, he's had the chance to perfect his skills in both. This summer, he took his bowling expertise on the road to Columbus, where he earned a gold medal in the Special Olympics State Summer Games!

When he returned home, Bittersweet shared the news on social media, and Sheldon's gold medal and huge smile took the world by storm! In a single day, his story reached over a quarter million people on Facebook, inspiring a chorus of congratulations from around the globe! Sheldon says he feels proud knowing that he impacted so many people: "I am so happy. I want to do it again!" Your fans are cheering you on, Sheldon!



Sheldon on a mini golf outing with his friends at Betty's Farm





Bittersweet, Inc.
 12660 Archbold-Whitehouse Rd.
 Whitehouse, OH 43571
 419-875-6986

www.bittersweetfarms.org



Harvesting Excellence



2023 WINNER: THE BLADE READERS' CHOICE-
 BEST LOCAL CHARITY & BEST PLACE TO WORK

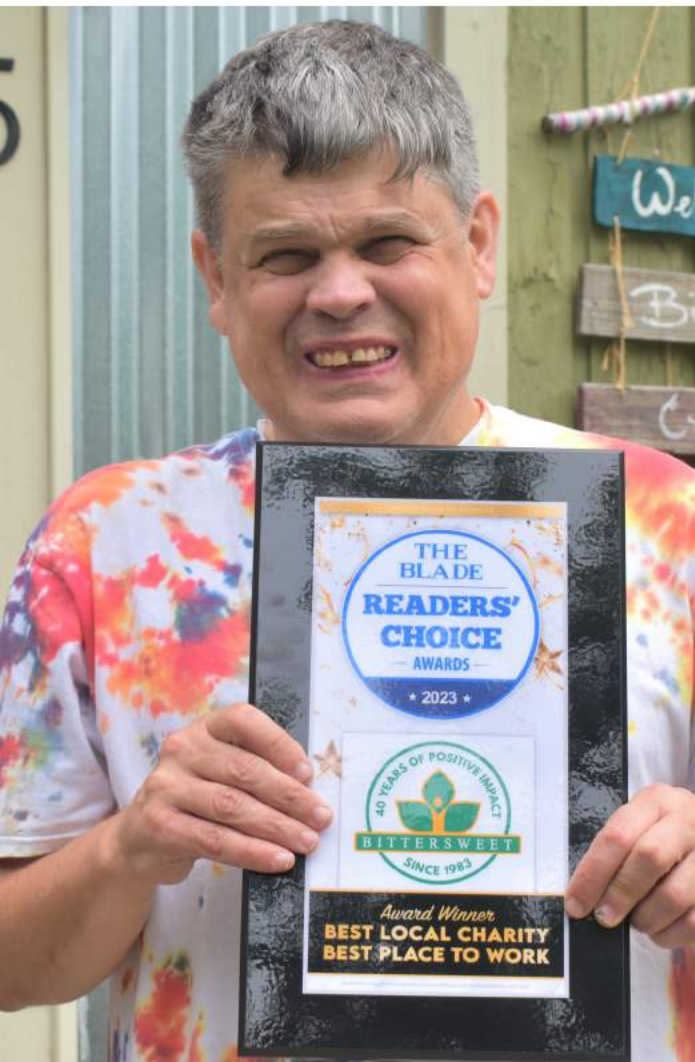


2022 WINNER: BETTER BUSINESS BUREAU
 TORCH AWARD FOR ETHICS



2022 RUNNER-UP: BEST OF TOLEDO-
 BEST CHARITY/NONPROFIT

**WE ARE HONORED BY YOUR SUPPORT
 THIS YEAR AND ALWAYS! THANK YOU!**



Catch Bittersweet on wheels at local festivals, fairs, and markets all year long! – Cece

Visit www.bittersweetfarms.org/events for our upcoming event schedule!

The mission of Bittersweet, Inc. is to positively impact the lives of individuals with autism and those whose lives they touch.