



Everything Michigan

Disability Network/Lakeshore executive director steps down after 19 years

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By Myron Kukla | The Grand Rapids Press

HOLLAND — In 19 years, Ruth Stegeman helped take Disability Network/Lakeshore from a small independent living agency to an organization that helps as many as 1,800 people a year with all kinds of disability issues and services.

Staff, clients and friends recently paid tribute to Stegeman, who is stepping down as executive director this month to take her career in a new direction.

"She has been the leader since the inception and has been our guiding force and rock, articulating the vision and the direction of Disability Network," said Rick Diamond, the organization's director of employment service.



Ruth Stegeman

Stegeman is launching Thinc Consulting LLC in Holland to help organizations and companies with strategic planning, visioning and leadership training.

"It's time to take a new career direction for me," said Stegeman, who will partner with psychologist Dev Butler on the new business. "Disability Network is well established with talented staff to carry it forward."

A search is being conducted to find a new executive director.

Disability Network provides help for people in Allegan and Ottawa counties on everything from developing job skills and finding employment to housing and community accessibility issues.

"I feel what one of our greatest accomplishments has been to help pass the (Macatawa Area Express) transit millage in 2006, which expands local bus service that opens up all of Holland, Holland Township and Zeeland for all people," Stegeman said.

"Every time I see a bus go by, I say, 'We helped do that.'"

Stegeman said she also is proud of making the organization one that is focused on "can do" instead of "can't do."

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"Ruth is a very empowering leader who has encouraged me to set my goals high and take on new challenges," said Lucia Rios, a six-year employee of Disability Network/Lakeshore who uses a wheelchair.

"I've been given the opportunity here to do what I can do, and I appreciate her encouragement."

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