

DENNIS WINKLER – WINK’S EATERY



2011

London, ON

Winks Eatery owner and Community Living London board of directors member, Dennis Winkler, was awarded the Second Annual Champions League Award last week at the Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) Champions for Change – Leadership in Workforce Development Conference in Alliston, ON.

Leading by example.

Dennis Winkler has been providing employment opportunities to people who have an intellectual disability for over 17 years. During the 1990’s when Dennis owned ten Burger King Outlets in the London area, he partnered with Community Living London to hire people who have a disability in each location, offering employment to 10 individuals with a disability.

Why hire a person with a disability?

There was a time when Dennis’ employees, like many other employees, were struck by the “complaint culture” and griped about their lives or jobs. These complaints suddenly stopped when Dennis introduced Christie, a new employee to one of his restaurants. Staff members were immediately taken by Christie’s motivation and enthusiasm. A positive change in their attitude emerged when Christie would report to work an hour earlier before her shift began. Christie who has Down’s syndrome was employed with Dennis’ Burger King franchise for over ten years.

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Dennis became an advocate for hiring people who have a disability. When he sold his Burger King franchise, Dennis’ legacy of inclusiveness carried on with the next owners, who maintained employment opportunities for five people who have a disability. Dennis next opened Touche Bakery, where he hired another reliable and industrious person who had a disability. After Dennis left the business, Touche Bakery continued its commitment to a diverse workforce by adding two more employees with a disability.

Currently Dennis and his son Adam, are the owners of Winks Eatery, a London restaurant that attracts over 2500 customers every week with a wide-ranging menu and great service. Once again Dennis eagerly hired a person who had a disability and welcomed them into the team.

The Winklers have also worked with students with special needs from the Thames Valley District School Board and individuals who recently acquired a brain injury with short-term work placements.

Advocating for a diverse workforce

Dennis has, and continues to advocate and promote the hiring of people who have a disability to his peers and other business owners. Dennis has been involved and featured in various marketing and branding campaigns. He has participated in London Chamber of Commerce event, sharing his story with other business owners and making the business case for an inclusive approach to hiring. He has actively promoted and mentored fellow business colleagues in inclusive hiring strategies.

The Champions League Award recognizes employer champions who have made outstanding progress in the movement of hiring people who have a disability, promoting this movement and making a commitment to continue it in the future. David C. Onley, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, and special guest speaker at the conference, presented the award. Onley’s own experiences with polio and post-polio syndrome, his successful career as a broadcaster, and his appointment as Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, made him a very inspiring role model.

ODEN is a professional body of employment service providers united to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

“Employers should never be nervous or afraid to hire people with a disability. My staff that were hired through Community Living London bring to the workforce a positive presence which is noticed by all of the staff.”

Dennis Winkler