

Living the dream: Autistic man gives back to the community

By Tara Rack-Amber trackamber@heraldstandard.com | Posted: Thursday, April 2, 2015 2:30 am

The day was overcast with spring hoping to burst past the dregs of winter. Standing at the glass door of the Union Station Clubhouse in Uniontown, George Hudak anxiously waits as he peers out into the day.

When the reporter arrives, Hudak nervously clutches papers, notes about his life. A smile appears on his slightly round face, crinkling his sparkling green eyes and stretching a wispy-brown mustache.

Preparing for his interview, Hudak fiddles the buttons on his burgundy dress shirt to make sure that he is ready.

A closer look at his face reveals not only nerves, but excitement — an excitement those who know him say Hudak brings to the world, an excitement for his volunteer work at the clubhouse, a subdivision of Goodwill Industries International, Inc. and an excitement about music and sharing his amazing story.

For as long as Hudak can remember, he has been diagnosed with autism, a group of developmental disabilities that can cause social, communication and behavioral challenges.

But despite these challenges, Hudak has followed his passions and achieved success that would rival anyone who doesn't face the same obstacles he faces every day.

In fact, in 2013, Hudak realized his greatest accomplishment yet — graduating from Penn State Fayette, The Eberly Campus, with a degree in organizational leadership.

“It took me a long time to figure out what I wanted to be,” says Hudak, his eyes shining and his smile larger.



Living with Adult Autism

Amanda Steen | Herald-Standard
George Hudak, who was diagnosed with autism as a child, folds laundry at a supervised Dom Care living facility in Masontown, while his home base worker, Audra Kenney supervises. The Dom Care home is a step away from living independently.

Seated next to George is Audra Kenney, his homebound worker through The Arc of Fayette County. She glows as she talks about him, obviously proud of his accomplishments.

“He is very bright about music,” she says, turning toward Hudak and adjusting the black and white stitched scarf hanging around her neck.

“Actually, Beethoven is a lot smarter than I am. But, get this, he was able to hear what he wanted to write in his head before he wrote it down,” explains Hudak, who will occasionally turn to Kenney using her as a sounding board to bounce off what he wants to say. The close friendship these two share is evident.

Kenney helps Hudak with various tasks such as grocery shopping, balancing his checkbook and other various activities at his domiciliary care home in Masontown, a living arrangement in the community for people age 18 and older who are in need of assistance with some of life’s activities and are currently unable to live independently.

Hudak’s love of music goes beyond knowing facts about famous composers though. He’s using his musical prowess to take on the monumental task of writing his own opera.

“There is a storytelling (element) called an epic,” Hudak says. “There is a conflict between good and evil. It involves a little bit of fighting and romance.”

In addition to writing an opera, Hudak’s musical aspirations include one day possibly opening a sheet music business.

“What this business will do,” Hudak explains excitedly, “is it will basically write music scores using music software and will make a copy to put online and make it available for print or download (or available in stores).”

But, until his dreams are realized, Hudak will continue with his current love, volunteering here at the clubhouse.

Hudak stands up and walks to a room that hosts a bank of computers. Intent on showing the duties he performs, he finds an employee to help him log on to the system and sits. Hudak’s fingers glide easily over the keyboard as he proudly explains how he handles the payroll for the clubhouse and the various checks and balances that are in place to help double check the figures.

He also adds that he has some new accounting responsibilities that include keeping a record of the money that is made at the clubhouse’s snack bar and through the purchase of bus passes.

“I think for anyone, it helps their self-esteem a lot,” said Scott Bobach, program director at the Union Station Clubhouse in a follow-up phone call. “They (clubhouse members) have the same aspirations to make money and buy what they need. It gives them a sense of

worth and builds their sense of esteem.”

Hudak’s mustache widens once again into a smile as he continues on about his volunteer work, but it quickly disappears when he turns his attention back to the computer, determined to continue toward his life goals and mindfully shove any autistic obstacles aside.