



DISABLED CITIZENS ALLIANCE FOR INDEPENDENCE
NEWSLETTER - SPRING / SUMMER 2025
SERVING IRON, CRAWFORD, DENT, REYNOLDS & WASHINGTON
COUNTIES

BE YE NOT AFRAID

I have been asked by some why I haven't written any articles for a while. I have been waiting to hear from the Lord on when to start again. Some of you know that the Good Lord called my sister Rita home on August 1, 2024. We had the great pleasure of having Rita live in the Bunk House for 4 years. Rita was 64 years old which is still very young. She was an amazing sister that always kept me on my toes. I can still hear her say, Don't start it! Rita spent her life living with my parents and the last 4 years with me.

Rita, Gail, and I all lived on an old farm between Fillmore and Rosendale, Missouri when we were first born. We lived down a ½ mile gravel lane and our home was an old log house that was very old. Our log home was nothing like the log homes today. This house had huge cracks and openings which would allow birds many times to visit us. Our father was a farmer that raised cattle, hogs, chickens, corn, and soybeans. This was a very happy time for all of us. We were raised in a far more simpler and peaceful time compared to today.

Rita, when being born, in delivery went a few minutes without oxygen. She was perfect physically but going without oxygen caused her to have some brain damage. Rita was a beautiful person that never grew mentally past a certain age. The mental condition required her to live with our family throughout her entire life. Rita and I had an amazing bond. I always knew I was going to make every effort to see she had a good life. I made the decision that Rita would come live with me in the event that my parents past. Rita gave me 64 years of pure joy.

The Lord put it on my heart, in 2017, to build the Bunk House for Rita when the time came. We named Rita's home the Bunk House because I had a great love of old western movies and the life of raising cattle. In the old days a bunk house was used to house the cowhands that worked on the ranch. Rita was definitely not a cowhand. She was fine with looking at them through a window or standing on the other side of the fence. I would always ask Rita to help me with the cows but knew that her head was moving from side to side with no effort to get out of her chair. When Rita would go to bed and when she first got up she would ask the same question. What are we going to do today? She always approached the new day with anticipation and happiness. She had a strong faith in the Lord and knew that the day was going to be a good one.

Rita's life was far simpler than most of ours. Since Rita's death, I have had a far more

peaceful way of looking at my life. Throughout my life, I have always pushed myself to accomplish things that would advance my career and increase my self being. I realize my strong drive and faith in God have gotten me where I am today. I am not sorry that I have been so focused and driven but realize that I have reached a time in my life that it is time to stop worrying about tomorrow. I take the time every day to think back on all the joys in my life. I have been blessed with such an amazing, family, friends, and life experiences. In thinking back to my start in the old log house until today, I have always had enough. I didn't need to push so hard and worry because God has always met my needs. What a wonderful thing to finally realize at this point in my life. I just get up every day giving God the glory and live my life to the fullest.

I realize that I am currently back where I started living on a farm. I no longer live in an old log house with sparrows flying around but a newer home. The country life is the same with fresh air, birds singing, wild life, and cows mooing. I am so thankful to be able to live my family's legacy. See my grandparents, aunts, uncles, and my parents all came from farms. I realize that God gave me the opportunity to return to this life. It is my desire to allow my family to also have the opportunity to live in the country. I plan on never selling my farm but leaving it so others can carry on our family legacy. It gives me such great joy knowing I can give another a great start in having a farm.

I am very thankful to DCAI for my job. DCAI gave me the opportunity to move to the Viburnum area and purchase my land. I have worked 12 ½ years so far for DCAI and plan on another 4 to 5 years more. DCAI started October 1, 1980 and this year will be its 45 year anniversary. I am focused and praying that when I retire DCAI will be in the position to continue at least another 50 years. Thank you DCAI for giving me the opportunity to work for you. My income has allowed me to purchase my land, build a home, and purchase my cattle. Because of you, I am living my dream.

I was given a sweat shirt this year that says, Faith Over Fear. I love this saying and am trying to put this into practice every day. Living this way has such great benefits for all of us. The choice is ours on how we live our life. I know this is my desire to live this way until the Lord calls me home. There is such great joy knowing I will see Rita, My family, and friends again. Thank you God!

My wish is that you hear these words from God every day like I do.

BE YE NOT AFRAID!

Dr. Dennis W. Atkins
March 2025

Guiding Lights: The Transformative Role of Mentors

By Jack McCormick

When I was 16, my impaired vision started to get worse. I was graduating high school soon and didn't know what these changes would mean for my future. I had dreams of becoming a CEO. As my vision worsened, I was more aware of the accessibility and attitudinal barriers I would need to overcome – not to mention adjusting to declining vision.

It was a challenging time. I was worried that the barriers were too big to surmount. At times I questioned if it was even worth trying. In the darker moments, I told myself to just give up. Thankfully there was a part of me that wasn't willing to do that and I realized that I wasn't the first blind / visually impaired guy with big dreams. Maybe I could find someone who had done it before?

Then, I found Dennis Atkins' website. He was exactly who I needed. Dennis is a CEO with a PhD who raises cattle and runs marathons on the side. A man who gives so much to his community and who supports his family. Did I mention he is blind?

I was a scared teenager and I sent him what I can only describe as a desperate email. He replied with kindness and optimism, offering to do what he could to help me. Dennis provided advice and encouraged me to continue with my post-secondary plans despite the hopelessness I felt.

I shared my fears and my desire to change the barriers that people like me experienced. He encouraged me to not forget my other dreams while I volunteered with disability organizations in an effort to change some of these barriers. His mentorship helped me through one of the darkest periods of my life.

I continued getting support from Dennis, reaching out to him when I thought he could help. In university, I co-founded a student club that worked to promote disability inclusion on campus and he flew to Canada to speak at one of our events. He is one of the most incredible people I've gotten to know.

Years later, Dennis and I still keep in touch. But he has not been my only mentor. In fact, I've had many mentors for the different seasons of my life. When I feel lost, stuck or just want to grow, I look for mentors who can share their wisdom, helping me take on the next challenge.

I do not know where I'd be without Dennis. Would I have given up without someone to look up to? At the very least, my life would have been harder. I know I would not be the person I am today without the mentors I've had in my life.

Living with a visual impairment isn't easy. It's important to know that you are not alone and that there are lots of people like Dennis. When you encounter a barrier or want to take on a new challenge, take the initiative to find people you can reach out to. I promise you will find someone who can help, even if it is just a bit. Life is better and richer when you've got a mentor cheering you on.

Jack McCormick resides in Toronto, Canada.



Jack and Dennis pictured above at Lake Ontario in 2019, when Dennis served as a guest speaker at Fighting Blindness Canada Conference.

2025 PRE-EMPLOYMENT YOUTH TRANSITION CAMP

DCAI Education Department held our annual Pre-Employment Transition Camps in June and July. We had a total of 9 students participate this year and were able to provide them with some necessary skills to better prepare them for the future.

During these weeks of camp the students had multiple opportunities to experience things such as shopping for interview attire, job shadowing around the community, budgeting and shopping to create a meal, voluntary clean-up and restoration of a local landmark, Dillard Mill, and preparing for their futures with a college tour. These students were also able to help purchase and distribute the school supplies for the Iron County C-4 School District. It was event packed weeks and the students really enjoyed giving back to the community.

It was a joy to get to spend time with the students, watching as they learned and experienced what their future can hold. We are excited to see what 2026 brings!



If you would like to know more about DCAI Pre-Employment Transition Services, please contact Ashley Hampton at 573-244-3456 ext. 3008.



Students learned life saving CPR skills while job shadowing with local Iron County EMS staff.



Students got to learn how to check oxygen levels, blood pressure and received a demonstration on how a defibrillator works.



It was all hands on deck, learning valuable cleaning skills by DCAI Custodian, Jennifer.





The kids enjoyed a day outside and got the opportunity to give back to the Community by volunteering at Dillard Mill State Park. They helped beautify the ground by staining a fence, relocating archived files and historical relics and took a break to enjoy the playground. The week was finished up with an afternoon at the Salem Community Pool.





YOUTH PRE-ETS CAMP

Fun • Food • Friendship



DCAI
8 Missouri Ave, Viburnum



June 15-19, 2026

What to Expect:

- Job Training
- Meal Planning
- Job Shadowing
- Leadership & Life Skills
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