

Changing the world

Costco members
find ways to improve
others' lives



CAROL KENT

Above: Dylan Vaughn; their service dog, Jinxy; Dylan's son, Ryan, modeling the powered PVC wheelchair that Dylan helped develop for his other son, Connor.

Movement for the masses

Costco member Dylan Vaughn got the fateful diagnosis in 2013: His son, Connor, then age 4, had a progressive form of muscular dystrophy called Duchenne. This rare genetic disease causes muscle weakness and degeneration throughout the body, including the heart and the respiratory system. Most people with Duchenne muscular dystrophy require a wheelchair by age 12. But a power wheelchair costs anywhere from \$1,500 to \$30,000, out of reach for many families.

"After the shock of diagnosis, I realized one way I could try to help Connor, and others, was to bring new technology into the space of people with disabilities," says Vaughn, a software developer. "I wanted to fill an unmet need for an affordable, easily built power chair."

To this end, Vaughn founded Robomakery

(robomakery.com) in 2016. He began creating different prototypes, made of PVC pipe and other readily available components. The goal was not to create a product that people could buy, but to design a reliable, functional, open-source power wheelchair that people could make themselves, saving anywhere from \$3,000 to \$20,000 over a commercially made power chair. Open source means the plans are freely available to anyone, making this do-it-yourself version affordable for nearly everyone.

Vaughn and his team of four volunteers and one contractor continue to enhance the design, making it more reliable, effective and accessible.

—*Elisabeth Handley*

Creating positive memories

When a young mom or dad is diagnosed with late-stage cancer, it's devastating for the children.



No one knows that better than Jon Albert, a Costco member in Atlanta.

“My wife, Jill, who had metastatic breast cancer, didn’t want Jake, age 9, or Jamie, age 7, to forget her—or, worse, only to remember the times she was undergoing debilitating treatment,” says Albert. “We created a treasured memory by taking a wonderful, important vacation to Hilton Head, South Carolina. The memories we created while Jill was still able to enjoy the trip were priceless.”

After Jill died in 2006, Albert wanted to help other cancer families create positive memories. He founded the Jack & Jill Late Stage Cancer Foundation (JAJF; JAJF.org), the only nonprofit in the nation that offers all-expenses-paid prescribed trips for families referred by major oncology centers.

Since its inception, JAJF has provided WOW! Experiences® for nearly 1,200 young families. For his commitment, Albert has received numerous honors. But he says his greatest rewards are the uplifting pictures and great joy he receives from JAJF families.

“Cancer specialists understand that the disease impacts the entire family,” Albert says.

JAJF is supported by donors, family foundations, grants and corporations. Albert says, “I’m happy to say we’ve never had to turn a family away.”—*Mickey Goodman*

Bottoms-up business

Think of Jessica Adams’ work as the “bottom line.” Since founding the St. Louis Area Diaper Bank in 2014, the Costco member has overseen the distribution of more than 2 million free diapers to families in need in the St. Louis metropolitan area.

According to the National Diaper Bank Network, 1 in 3 families experience “diaper need”—difficulty providing enough diapers to consistently keep a child clean, dry and healthy. Adams was once in that very position, after going through a divorce, attending graduate school and raising four young children on no income.

“We struggled to make ends meet, and the one thing I could never find assistance with was diapers,” she says. “When you can’t provide your child with one of the most basic needs, you feel hopeless and helpless.”

Diaper drives and cash donations fund the diapers that the bank distributes through 35 community partners, ranging from food pantries to health clinics to educational organizations. Each pack of diapers comes with a handwritten “love note” of encouragement that means the world to recipients.

“One mother has saved every single note,” Adams says. “She told us, ‘They make me feel like I am not doing this alone and that someone cares about me and my kids.’”—*Kristin Baird Rattini*

Above left: Left to right: Jill Albert, who passed away in 2006 from breast cancer, is the inspiration for the Jack & Jill Late Stage Cancer Foundation; daughter Jamie, son Jake and Jon, on their own WOW! Experience just a few months before Jill died.

Above right: Jessica Adams has helped distribute more than a million free diapers to families in need.