

## Front

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# Everyday Angels: She helps others find work, independence

BY WENDY LEMUS, STAFF WRITER

Adults with developmental disabilities are often a "forgotten population."

They're not forgotten by Mary Madenspacher.

Madenspacher has devoted her professional life to social work, and for the last 12 years has focused on giving adults with challenges such as Down syndrome opportunities to work, earn a paycheck and thrive in their community.

Madenspacher is executive director of Cary-based Life Experiences Inc.

The program currently has about 41 developmentally disabled adults — ranging in age from their 20s to their 60s — working in one of several small businesses operated by the nonprofit.

On any given day some employees will be baking brownies, breads and cookies for restaurants and other customers. Other employees may be preparing the silverware and napkins used by airlines or washing and folding stacks of towels for local health clubs. Still others may be out servicing vending machines, collecting coins and restocking the machines with sodas and snacks.

A staff of about seven full-time employees helps to supervise the disabled employees and oversee operations of the small businesses.

Madenspacher, a Meredith College alumna, said that unlike other areas of her life, her work gives her that satisfaction of really having helped someone at the end of the day.

"The more you give, the more you get back," Madenspacher said.

And it's not just the employees she is helping. Their families "can go on to pursue their interests and take care of financial responsibilities, knowing that their loved one who is here is secure and thriving," Madenspacher said.

Perhaps Madenspacher's greatest reward is having "41 people who want to give me a hug every morning."

### Life Experiences

Life Experiences depends on grants and other financial assistance from the community in order to run its small businesses. The nonprofit is currently running a campaign to raise \$1 million to expand its services.

For information visit [lifeexperiences.org](http://lifeexperiences.org). To order party trays, box lunches or homemade goodies from Life Experiences, visit the Web site. The more you give, the more you get back.

Contact Wendy Lemus at 460-2605 or [wlemus@nando.com](mailto:wlemus@nando.com).



Mary Madenspacher chats with Cassi Goodman, left, and Julie Rasmussen, two of her employees at Life Experiences.

Photo by Ray Black III for The Cary News

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### Everyday Angels

Whether or not you believe in angels, chances are you know someone who embodies those qualities of goodness and light.

We've picked a few people right here in our community who bring hope and caring into others' lives and inspire those around them: a social worker who helps mentally disabled adults to thrive in the workplace; a pastor who takes his message into prisons; a woman who makes sure abandoned cats get good homes; a neighbor who has befriended two motherless sisters; and a businessman who helped start a utility-bill relief program for the needy. They certainly have inspired us.

**She helps others find work, independence**  
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