

NEW PRIDE FOR ADULTS WITH AUTISM



Don Bennetti, 65

Edison, N.J.

Diagnosed with autism at age 4, Don Bennetti's son Luke, 29, has struggled at times to feel good about himself. One thing that has worked wonders: holding down a job, whether breaking down boxes at a department store or preparing food at a steak house. "It's given him such self-esteem," Don says.

Drawing on his business experience, the banker in 2006 founded Men with Mops, a cleaning and odd-jobs service staffed by autistic adults who, like Luke, attend the Douglass Developmental Disabilities Center at Rutgers University. Men with Mops, which Don funded himself, employs 11 men—and one woman—who work under a trained supervisor and earn the \$7.25 hourly minimum wage cleaning bathrooms, doing yardwork and running errands for a dozen homes and businesses, says Chris Manente, the center's program coordinator. (Luke tried cleaning but prefers working in food services.)

Employers give the crew a thumbs-up. "They're diligent in their dusting—it smells wonderful after they're done," says Helena Coles, manager of a local insurance company. Parents are thrilled to see their grown-up kids thriving at work. "His life is fuller, and he's accomplishing things," says Enzo Zoroni, father of Mops staffer Adam, 32. Adds Linda Shaffer, mother of Matt, 25: "This was a tremendous, unselfish thing for Don to do."

By Thailan Pham

"It's amazing to see the smiles on their faces when they go to work," says Don (with the Men with Mops crew).

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