

History Note: For 45 years, Rise has elevated the lives of many

by [Access Press Staff](#) // February 10th, 2016



Incorporated in 1971, Rise is a private, nonprofit 501(c) (3) organization which supports people who have disabilities and other barriers to finding employment, housing and personal growth. Rise unlocks potential and opens doors to success for people with disabilities or other challenges through creative solutions and customized support. Rise helps people throughout the state with its many programs.

The first story was about the Tollefsons. Rise got its start thanks to Chester “Chet” and Gladys Tollefson of Anoka, who wanted opportunities for their son Loring and for other young people with disabilities. In its 45 Stories for 45 Years series, the first story featured the Tollefsons and their dream of meaningful work and personal growth for Loring.

The family was able to get many Anoka County leaders to support their dream. Rise opened its doors August 2, 1971, to serve four people who had intellectual and related disabilities. Volunteers helped convert a truck garage in Spring Lake Park into a production floor and staff offices. With several expansions over the years, it is still Rise’s administrative headquarters.

Loring and Gladys Tollefson have died, but Chet has lived to see Rise reach 45 years. “I really never dreamed Rise would take off like it did and become the agency it is today,” he said recently. “‘My Impossible Dream’ came true in so many ways I couldn’t have imagined. Hats off to everyone over the years who has worked so hard.”

A second story recalled the first four Rise clients: Ted Brown, Kathleen Schuldt, Bruce Johnson and Robert Lehn. Brown is the only one of the four still alive today. In 1971 he was 19 years old and had just completed his public schooling. He was eager to get to work and enjoyed the variety of production subcontracts the team of four was tasked with.

Today, at age 64, Brown is gradually winding down his long career. He works part-time at Rise's production facility in Spring Lake Park. Over the years, he has worked at many businesses throughout the Twin Cities area including Medtronic, Federal Premium Ammunition, Shapco, Red Lobster, Liberty Carton and Faribault Foods and a meditation center.

Brown is also an accomplished musician who played keyboard and sang with the band, The Windjammers, for many years. His musical highlight was performing in 1989 at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. with Very Special Arts (now VSA). Brown described that experience as the thrill of a lifetime. He also sings with Project POWER and is excited about the salute to George Harrison and the Beatles they will perform later this year.

"Rise is a great place to work with lots of different jobs," said Brown. "Everyone needs to always do his best. And everyone needs to choose his own song and do the best you can with the music you've been given."

Read more of Rise's 45 moments at www.rise.org/

Access Press is interested in reader submissions for the monthly History Note column, to complement the articles. Submissions must center on events, people and places in the history of Minnesota's disability community. We are interested in history that focuses on all types of disability topics, so long as the history has a tie to Minnesota. We are especially interested in stories from Greater Minnesota. Please submit ideas prior to submitting full stories, as we may have covered the topic before. Contact us at access@accesspress.org or 651-644-2133 if you have questions. The History Note is a monthly column sponsored by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, www.mnddc.org or www.mncdd.org and www.partnersinpolicymaking.com.