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# Woman finds employment fulfillment with Community Options

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**BOB MCMILLAN**

COOKEVILLE — Greeting customers, bussing tables and washing dishes is all in a day’s work for Amanda Pruitte.

“She’s always got a smile on her face,” said Brian Mueller, owner of Blue Coast Burrito, where Pruitte has been working for more than a year with assistance from Community Options Inc. “She gets along with everybody in here. She comes in and works hard.”

The 32-year-old Cookeville woman has been part of Community Options — which provides housing, support services and advocacy assistance to people with disabilities — for 10 years.

In December 2013, she had decided to pursue a new challenge.

“She would say a lot that she wanted a job,” program manager Amanda Franklin said. “She didn’t have enough to do and was kind of bored.”

Which led her to Blue Coast Burrito.

“It’s working out great,” said Mueller, noting that Pruitte works four days a week during lunch time, taking care of the front dining room, dish room and whatever else needs to be done.

“She knows a lot of the customers who come in every day and is a big part of what we do,” he said. “It’s a big responsibility, and she’s come a long way.”

Pruitte has no complaints.

“I like it,” she said, adding that she enjoys the food, talking to people and making friends.

“I’m just glad to have her,” Mueller added. “She really is a part of the team. She knows everybody here, and we all love her to death.”

And that's just the kind of thing Franklin likes to hear.

"When she started working, it was only two days a week," she said. "Then Brian thought she was so great that he upped it to four days a week. He actually wanted her five days, but she wanted one day off to go out to eat with her roommates and go shopping."

Franklin explained that Community Options is a provider agency that receives state funding through the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

"We support individuals with developmental disabilities and have residential homes that we staff 24/7," she said. "We help people with daily living skills, employment, administering medications and fulfilling whatever goals they have."

The Cookeville office, which opened in 2004, serves 15 individuals and has seven residential homes — three in Cookeville and four in Algood.

"If people are in need of services, they get on the waiting list," Franklin said. "Or, if they're in a crisis or emergency situation, they can get placed right away."

Pruitt lives with two roommates in a three-bedroom Community Options house. And, like her, one of them enjoys the benefits of a job, working a couple hours a week dusting shelves and putting stickers on scratch-off cards at Infinity Pharmacy.

Two other Community Options individuals work to keep the Upper Cumberland Development District building clean.

"We've partnered with a lot of people in the community for jobs," Franklin said. "It's pretty awesome."

She hopes others will support the cause as well by participating the Cupid's Chase 5K on Feb. 14 at 10 a.m. at the Tennessee Tech University Tucker Stadium parking lot.

"It's our one big fundraiser," Franklin said of Community Options, which started nationally in 1989.

"It's our eighth year, and we do the race all over the country on the same day."

That includes nine states and 28 cities.

Registration is \$30 before Feb. 13 or \$50 on race day at 8 a.m. Walkers and runners are welcome, and proceeds go toward supporting people with disabilities. To learn more, visit [cupidschase.org](http://cupidschase.org) or call 931-372-0955.

Blue Coast Burrito customers can also help the cause on Feb. 10 from 5-9 p.m. as 10 percent of sales will be going to Community Options.

"We'll also have registration forms for Cupid's Chase," Franklin said. "We want it to be a big event. It'll probably be cold, but that's part of the fun!"