

**To: Doug Oathout or Jim Martin**

Since joining the staff of the Barber National Institute four years ago, I have seen firsthand how committed this organization is every day to the children, adults and families it serves, to its employees and to the future of our community.

Our mission statement includes the words “we make dreams come true.” I can honestly state that our administration and staff take that very literally as we work to support individuals with autism and other disabilities. Our organization has fostered a culture that focuses on the individual’s abilities instead of disabilities, even when it means overcoming significant obstacles and challenges.

That same positive attitude extends to the commitment that the Barber National Institute has made to the community. In spite of massive reimbursement cutbacks by the state that led to very difficult decisions, the organization continues to demonstrate its unwavering determination to serve as a stable and viable employer in the region, employing more than 2,100 staff statewide, with the majority here in Erie. Unlike other organizations that have shifted the administrative and decision-making functions out of town, the Barber National Institute has made a commitment to keeping its main campus in Erie and playing a significant role in the community and local economy.

I feel that I have a unique perspective in that I am not an Erie native. I relocated from Jacksonville, Florida just over four years ago. Coming from the largest city in Florida, I can affirm that there is no other organization such as the Barber National Institute. Erie is very fortunate to have an organization as diverse as the BNI. I have developed strong ties to my “adopted home” in large part because the Barber National Institute has been such a rewarding place to work. It is indeed a pleasure to be part of an organization where everyone—from the children, adults, families and staff—is treated with such a deep sense of respect and value.