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## Introducing the Ohio Tech Ambassadors



Renee Wood —

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Renee has been involved in the disability community all her adult life, beginning at age 18 with volunteering as a camp counselor with Camp Easter Seals and culminating in late 60's serving as chair of Ohio Developmental Disability for three years, and currently chairs the Ohio Olmstead Task Force, a member of the Ohio Statewide Independent Living Council, Ability Center Board of Trustees, and sits on the Ohio Advocacy Taskforce. Renee graduated from the University of Toledo with an Associate's Degree in computer programming, and a combined Bachelor's degree in Disabilities Studies and Creative Writing.

Throughout the years Renee has engaged in various advocacy efforts, which has earned her prestigious awards such as, the seldom given Synergy Award, after a final presentation (<https://youtu.be/qQtgUVmFmEA>) she earned the Soaring Phoenix Award. Renee has also received Northwest Ohio Trail Blazer Award, The National Council for Independent Living gave her the Region V Advocacy Award, and recently she has been inducted into The Ability Center's Hall of Fame (<https://www.abilitycenter.org/ability-center-centennial/>). One of Renee's hobbies is writing her blog Renee's Ramblings (<https://reneewood2.com/>). She does digital art and really enjoys creating paintings of nature scenes.

Renee recalls assistive technology being part of her life from a very young age — usually just simple things like a key guard on her typewriter so she wouldn't press multiple keys at a time, or a book holder in 5th grade to make it easier to read. Renee is a problem solver — in the 80's, before microwave ovens, to get the flimsy aluminum foil TV dinners in/out of the hot oven, she accomplished this by putting the TV dinner in a cake pan, which she bent one side of, so she could slide it onto the table. She also developed silverware to help feed herself. Renee had her first computer in 1998 and taught herself Word, Excel, Access, Powerpoint, HTML, and web design. Renee now uses Amazon Alexa to control her environment and increase her independence (<https://youtu.be/Z7VxEhwibtI>). Renee believes technology is the future for people with disabilities living more independent and autonomous lives.



Jen Schlegel —  
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Jen Schlegel wears a lot of hats. She is a recent Ohio State University Alumna and President's Prize Fellow, a Biomedical Engineer with patents pending, a Camelback Ventures fellow, and a certified Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator. She owns an accessibility technology startup company, Beenabled, that has two active projects under development: Handicom and 119. Handicom is a software/mobile application that facilitates the connection between ideas and written work. Its finger-tap interface helps individuals with limited manual dexterity to import homework, images, diagrams, equations and more. 119 is a subscription-based service for smartwatches or smartphones that helps the chronic illness community reduce the number of 911 calls made on their behalf.

Jen has also contributed to efforts being made by DriveOhio, an initiative within the Ohio Department of Transportation, that aims to organize and accelerate smart vehicle and connected vehicle projects in the State of Ohio. In her spare time, Jen enjoys learning and creating new things – a peer has called her The Idea Fountain! On a typical day, you can find her surrounded by whiteboards and 3D printers. Her life is made more interesting everyday by disability and chronic illness starring cerebral palsy and dysautonomia with a dozen other guest stars that require tubes, wheels, and machines.



Brad Whitmoyer —  
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William “Brad”, Whitmoyer was born in 1983 in Columbus, Ohio with a diagnosis of cerebral palsy. When he was four years old, he moved to the country in Delaware county and grew up there with three brothers. From a young age, Brad and his brothers regularly had to develop solutions in order to keep him involved with what his family was doing. Whether that was a backyard football game, or making his equipment work better, he and his brothers worked together to figure out how to get things done.

This type of ingenuity has followed him throughout his life. After graduating high school, it became very clear to Brad that obtaining employment from a company would be very difficult and as such, he decided to create his own employment opportunity by starting his own company building websites. Brad's company has grown to encompass multiple computer-related services and is now a viable source he uses to provide for himself.



**Marci Straughter —**  
**marci@ohiotechambassadors.org**

Marci Straughter lives in Franklin County but is originally from California, where she attended acting classes at the Performing Arts School West before moving to Ohio. She represents the Franklin County Board of DD’s Self Advocate Advisory Council with Superintendent Jed Morrison. A strong believer in advocacy, she is a Project STIR Statewide Trainer and has trained over 100 people in the state of Ohio to speak up for themselves and has helped them become Ohio leaders.

Marci was appointed by Governor Kasich to the Ohio DD Council in April 2014 and just completed her second term. She is the Chairwoman for the Advisory Committee for her provider, Ohio at Home, and is a member of the Board for The Council of Ohio Leaders (COOL). COOL serves as an

advisory board for the Ohio Self Determination Association. Most recently, Marci was asked to be a part of the APSI and We Thrive Together boards. She has also been asked to serve on the I am Boundless board, a larger provider in Ohio. Marci is also excited to be a part of the ISP workgroup that is working to create a standard ISP for the state. Marci greatly enjoys cooking and has a Facebook page called Marci’s “Keep It Cookin” Cookbook!



**Christopher Cooley —**  
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Christopher Cooley is a legally blind and deaf person from Portsmouth, Ohio, whose life is greatly enhanced by the use of his service dog, a three-year-old golden retriever named Larkin. A former student at the Helen Keller Institute, he appreciates life and believes in having fun, always enjoying meeting new people and making new friends. Chris is not only a positive person who dreams big, he is also big on standing up for the rights of disabled people and bringing awareness about disabilities and service dogs. As a result of his work with Ohio Representatives and

Senators, in May 2016 Ohio Bill 121 passed in the 131st General Assembly, making Ohio the first state in the U.S. to have a “Service Dog Awareness Week,” which happens the last week of July each year.

Chris is also passionate about remote support technologies and the role they play in helping people with disabilities to live more independent lives. One of his favorite sayings is, “If you set your mind to do something you can do it, and I will be the first to show that as folks with disabilities, we can do it — maybe we have to do it differently, but we can do it.” This attitude shines through as Chris encourages his peers to use technology and advocates for businesses to accommodate people with disabilities.



Nathan Turner —  
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Nathan Turner has spent 15 years advocating for justice, accessibility and equal rights in the disability community. He was educated in political science and international studies at Wright State University, where he used Dragon NaturallySpeaking to win Outstanding Position Paper and Outstanding Delegation at the National Model United Nations conference four times. He currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Lucas County Board of Developmental Disabilities, where he is also the president of their self-determination organization SALUTE. Nathan is deeply passionate about building leadership capacity for people with disabilities and regularly gives presentations on safely interacting with police officers, financial literacy and the impact of public benefits while working, assertive communication and problem-solving, and the benefits of community employment for people with disabilities.

Nathan is also a member of the Board of Trustees for Advocates for Basic Legal Equality and is a past member of the Ohio Statewide Independent Living Council. He believes technology is critical to educating people with disabilities on assertiveness, rights and responsibilities and promoting independence. He enjoys demonstrating the benefits of low-cost technologies such as digital assistants to allow people with disabilities innovative opportunities to connect with their communities, learn new skills and lead more self-determined lives. Outside of his advocacy, his hobbies include researching the latest technologies, listening to newspapers and audiobooks, eating great Italian recipes, playing digital versions of his favorite casual games and having a great cup of coffee while streaming the latest TV and movies. Nathan is employed as a Senior Web Quality Rater for Lionbridge Global Support Services and works as a freelance data annotator where he supports many of the major technology companies.



Tanner Huff —  
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Tanner Huff is a passionate advocate for accessibility who has used technology to assist him for 22 of his 29 years. Tanner has proud memories of his earliest advocacy experience in Chesapeake, Ohio, where he gave a presentation to his district's school board after meeting with the engineer who had designed the high school and identified where it needed accessibility improvements. Tanner's efforts resulted in his school district receiving a \$250,000 grant to make its buildings accessible. After this came other changes at Marshall University and at OU's Proctorville and Ironton campuses where ramps, walkways and restrooms were made accessible at Tanner's urging while he worked on a degree in Human Service Technologies.

Tanner, who now lives in Ironton, Ohio, has volunteered at Mountain State Centers for Independent Living, where he worked with people who have either autism or mental health issues. He has also served as an advisor to RCBI, where he assisted them with the accessibility of their Maker Vault

product, which is hardware and software that enables people without engineering backgrounds to design high end professional equipment. Tanner is looking forward to continuing this effort once COVID-19 has passed as well as his hobbies of four wheeling and car shows. He is still pursuing his local school district about the accessibility of the football stadium!



## Robert Shuemak — [robert@ohiotechambassadors.org](mailto:robert@ohiotechambassadors.org)

Robert Shuemak was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio, as a child with serious visual impairment due to optic nerve issues. His is a story of technology maturing as he personally matured. Robert recalls going to school in the pre-technology era as a legally blind person and having to read bulky, large print books. He obtained his GED at age 25 with portions of the test being delivered orally. He was first introduced to computers at age 30 and with the aid of technology started college at the University of Cincinnati two years later, graduating with a bachelor's degree in Social Work in 2005.

The accessibility of public transportation has been of particular significance in Robert's life and he sees it as a key element of independent living. This had been a challenge to him in the past, but now he is able to use smartphone apps that allow him to travel alone. Screen readers such as JAWS and speech to text technologies help him remain connected to the online world and to be a valuable staff member of the Hamilton County Board of DD, where he works on their Advocacy Support Team providing support and advice to individuals on technology as well as other things. Robert is affiliated with many different organizations such as the Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Center for Independent Living Options. He also serves on many committees, advisory boards and advocacy groups such as Neighbors in Action.

Today, 26.9% of Ohioans live with a disability. Ohio has long been a leader in promoting technology for its citizens with disabilities. Funded by "a statewide grant provided by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities and administered by The Southern Ohio Council of Governments, the Ohio Tech Ambassador Network program will host almost twenty events through June 2023, some virtual and some in-person, to help others learn how adaptive technology use enhances lives and independence for people with developmental disabilities. To learn more about the Ohio Tech Ambassador Network or to learn about upcoming events, visit [ohiotechambassadors.org](http://ohiotechambassadors.org).

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