Donning a pair of safety glasses and ear-plugs, Robert throws a handful of loose CDs from Sara Evans and The Beach Boys onto a conveyor belt.

The disks reach the grinder. The noise is thunderous as they are ground into small chips of shimmering plastic and sifted into a large bag at the end of the machine.

Barnes is an employee at ACT Works, the recycling program of Alternative Community Training, an organization that provides jobs to those with disabilities.

“Most of ACT Works focus was to reuse videotapes in the past, but now we’re focusing on fully recycling,” Jim Williams, ACT Works’ program manager, said.

Williams said the organization had been sending a lot of its intact plastic items to China to be recycled. In May, 2007 the organization was told its buyers in the Far East were no longer interested.

A $50,000 grant from the Missouri Market Development Program financed ACT Works’ purchase of the grinding machinery and allowed it to expand the list of items it accepts and refocus recycling efforts. June 11 was the first day the employees fed CDs and DVDs into the granulator and collected more than 1,000 pounds of ground plastic in a large sack donated by the local Quaker Oats factory.

In the near future, ACT Works plans to add a machine that will be able to disassemble and grind video and audio cassette tapes, a service that’s not offered by any other recyclers in Mid-Missouri.

Before, ACT Works was receiving between 3 and 6 cents a pound for the raw plastic sent to China. Now, each bag of ground CDs and DVDs can sell for 45 to 65 cents per pound, depending on the market. For an average bag of the polycarbonate plastic, which holds 1,300 pounds, profits could reach more than $800.

There are 72 people with disabilities who work in the ACT Works program. With nearly 25 individuals on the employment waiting list, Williams said he hopes they are able to create more jobs with the addition of the new machinery.

“It’s always a great feeling seeing a person learn a new task,” he said. “Their paychecks may not be as big as somebody’s, but they’re just as excited to get one.”
ACT EARNHS HIGHEST ACCREDITATION

ACT has earned the highest accreditation by an international accreditation organization, CARF, the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities.

The accreditation is for three years and is ACT’s eighth consecutive accreditation. ACT has received CARF’s accreditation since 1987.

ACT, which provides numerous services to individuals with disabilities, received high marks for all areas of the organization. The accreditation covers: Community Integration, Community Living, various areas of Community Employment and Organizational Employment Services.

“Your organization should take pride in achieving this high level of accreditation,” says Brian J. Boon, Ph.D., president and CEO of CARF. “This achievement is an indication of your organization’s dedication and commitment to improving the quality of the lives of the persons served,” he says. “Services, personnel, and documentation clearly indicate an established pattern of practice excellence.”

“We’re delighted with the outcome,” adds ACT Executive Director Mark Hassemer. “For our consumers and their families this is an assurance that this organization has met accredited standards that are applied to organizations around the world. Our consumers and their families should have a level of comfort knowing we have this accreditation.”

Some comments by CARF regarding ACT include:

• The persons served are the focus of ACT, and it is noted that communication regarding their concerns is a positive strength.
• The organization is committed to continuous quality improvements for gathering, analyzing, and utilizing performance improvement data.

NEW POSITIONS ADD 18 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

The Community Integration Program just added more than 18 years of experience.

Named Program Supervisors are Ed Ricciotti, who has 12 years of experience with the program’s Day Program, and Doug Edgar, who has six years of experience in the field.

Having worked for ACT for a dozen years, Ricciotti admits he knows all the people and has a good rapport with many of them.”

He says he’s always tried to progress in his profession. “You need to keep changing and evolving,” he says. “I’ve evolved and the more you’re in this field and dedicated to this field the more you know that there’s a lot more to learn. You think you have a decade of experience, but that’s not enough.”

He adds that “this was a good time to step it up” and take on new responsibilities. “We’re building something that’s really special, really unique here at ACT.” He mentions a new senior-oriented program known as the Community Advantage Program which will begin some time in the near future.

He’s also been part of an evolution in the human services field where consumers now are encouraged to be advocates for themselves.

“Ten, twelve years ago we were the advocates for our consumers. Now we’re trying to promote self advocacy for our consumers. I’ve seen that evolving and that’s a big change.”

Being part of ACT’s launch of the Community Advantage Program will be Doug Edgar who has six years of experience in human services. He provided services to individuals with disabilities in a program linked to the University of Missouri-Columbia. He also earned both bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University.

While in Columbia Doug became familiar with ACT and learned of its reputation as a quality provider.

“I’m glad to be here. I was familiar with ACT because some previ-
Spotlight Sherry Tonsor

COLLEGE LEADS TO COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT JOB

Three years of work with ACT as a college student has paid off well for Sherry Tonsor. She was recently promoted to Program Supervisor in the Community Employment Program.

Tonsor, a native of Monroe City, earned a bachelor’s degree in human development and family studies with a minor in psychology from the University of Missouri-Columbia. She learned a great deal, she says, while working as an Employment Training Specialist at ACT during her college years. She added more experience by completing an internship with ACT immediately before graduating. As she was graduating, she was promoted to Job Development Coordinator in December 2007.

“I really enjoy working with people and helping people,” she says. “This job definitely lets you do that. It’s very rewarding. I love that it’s helping others every day.”

Tonsor says she particularly likes her job because there are so many facets to it. She’s “basically the go-to person when there is an issue. I’m also here to help develop more relationships with businesses.”

Working out in the field also is one of her favorite job responsibilities. “It’s nice to see our consumers successfully employed. It’s very rewarding.”

She adds that she’s always enjoyed working for ACT. “It’s a great organization overall,” she says. She says she’s particularly glad that ACT offers opportunities for training and advancement.

“It was a wonderful place to work in college. I gained lots of experience and it led me to stay and continue to learn. I hope to be around for quite a while.”

SOLID JOB PATH. Sherry Tonsor, a new Community Employment Program Supervisor, started with ACT while attending the University of Missouri-Columbia.

NEWS briefs

MORE THAN 1,500 TAPES DONATED

A Kansas City resident, David Breshears, recently donated 1,539 videotapes to ACT for recycling. Mr. Breshears, who drove the tapes to ACT, donated the material in honor of his late wife, Velma.

WAREHOUSE SPACE DONATED

A former furniture store’s warehouse space has been donated for ACT to store recyclable materials.

Jim Williams, Program Manager of ACT Works says 280 pallets of videotapes, audio-cassettes and diskettes are now stored at the warehouse, located in the former Rust and Martin furniture facility located at Interstate 70 and Missouri Highway 40.

ACT had been able to use, free of charge, space donated by Mid-City Lumber, located near ACT facilities. The business, however, leased the space, thus triggering the search for a new warehouse space by ACT. Williams had called numerous sites but only the current site would donate the space for free.

“It’s nice they let us in there,” says Williams. “We really appreciate what they’re doing for us.”

ACT LEADS STATE IN DIRECT SUPPORT COURSEWORK

ACT continues to lead the state in participation in the College of Direct Support. To date, 46 ACT employees have completed the requirements to earn their College of Direct Support certificate. Attaining the certificate gives the participant the title of Direct Support Professional, or DSP. It also provides them a financial incentive from ACT.

ACT personnel have earned more than one-fifth of all certificates given in the state. ACT employees have completed more than 5,000 lessons in the program. The program involves 13 on-line, college-level courses.

A total of 129 ACT employees, have been, or currently are, part of the program.

Seven ACT supervisors or managers have completed the College of Frontline Supervision and Management courses, also part of the College of Direct Support program.

“We’re definitely one of the highest achieving agencies in the state,” says Michelle Saunders, Program Manager of the Community Integration Program, and a leader in the statewide effort to develop an education program for direct-care professionals. She also mentions “Retention is up. People are staying longer because they’re taking these courses on line. It’s very wonderful.”

SECOND HOME OPENED FOR TEENS

ACT has opened its second home for teen consumers. Located in the Cedar Lake area of southwest Columbia, the residence currently is the home of David who was referred to ACT early this year.

“It’s a beautiful house,” says Terri Kruger, program manager for the Community Living Program. The young resident “is proud of his home and he’s doing a really good job of keeping his home clean and learning how to cook.”

David, 16, came from a more institutional setting and is taking every opportunity to do things he’s never done before. Recently he attended a Little League baseball game, something he’d never done before, says Kruger. He’s also able to go to movies, bowling, fishing and “is experiencing a lot of the things he’s not experienced before. David presented himself as such a tough kid but with the family environment he is in and the ability to just be a kid he is doing great.” she adds. “He’s such a good kid.”

David volunteers at the Mid-Missouri Humane Society and the Central Missouri Food bank. Soon he’ll enter Rock Bridge High School as a sophomore.

And ACT currently is looking for a suitable housemate for David. “He needs a friend,” says Kruger. “He needs somebody to hang out with who is his own age.”

Krugeradds that the house staff is adapting to working with a teenager rather than an adult.

“It’s a big change from working with adults with disabilities to working with children with disabilities,” she says. “It’s a totally different mindset with the staff and they are handling the change with ease.”
Jessica Boffa likes to put people to work. As the new Program Manager of the Community Employment Program she’s responsible for the many aspects necessary to employ ACT consumers.

“It’s really exciting,” says Boffa, who had been a Community Liaison before her recent promotion.

“I look forward to continue to work hard and deliver quality services to our consumers,” she says. “Our goal is to build more relationships so that we can do an even better job in the future.”

In her role she oversees many activities including providing trial job experiences, placement, oversight of the consumer once employment begins, and maintaining solid relationships with employers and referral agencies.

“It means a lot to the community,” she says. “Making our consumers productive taxpayers members of society does a lot. It helps, not only with them individually, but it also makes an impact on the employer. Everyone as a whole can benefit with hiring individuals with disabilities.”

One area Boffa particularly looks forward to is building relationships with more businesses in the Columbia area. She wants to make sure more employers know about the many services ACT provides in the Community Employment Program.

“We want to tell businesses about benefits we offer them as opposed to focusing on the social services aspect of ACT” says Boffa.

“We do a lot of things that really benefit the business. Our jobseekers open up a whole new pool of qualified applicants for them,” says Boffa. “We offer really good services to businesses.”

Boffa hopes to contact four to five new businesses a month with human resource managers as her primary target. She also hopes to tap into the many networks ACT employees are part of. “It’s really important for us to use all the networks we have. If we use the networks we already have here we could probably make some connections out in the community as well.”

New Department Adds Behavior Therapist

Cloy Dellaripa joins the Behavior Therapy Department as it grows to new levels.

She has joined the department as a part-time therapist working alongside full-time therapist Tara Shade.

“The need was pretty significant,” says Terri Kruger, program manager for the Community Living Program and Behavior Therapy Program, “that’s why we started the program from the beginning.”

Currently about 35 hours per week of actual therapy time is used by the department’s therapists. And the caseload has grown from two consumers to as many as 20. Much of the demand comes from other agencies, with some of the consumers crossing into ACT’s Community Integration Program.

For Dellaripa, working part-time is very satisfying. She is a master’s trained therapist having earned her graduate degree from Arizona State University. Prior to joining ACT, the Arizona native was a family therapist at Boys and Girls Town of Missouri in Columbia.

One example of gaining new knowledge involves “learning how to do behavioral therapy with non-verbal consumers.” Communication is the key to creating positive behaviors and learning with non-verbal individuals how to communicate is a new experience for her.

She says she was always interested in working more with individuals with disabilities but did not get the training while in college or the opportunity at her previous job to work with individuals with disabilities that were nonverbal.

She adds that ACT “is a very family-oriented organization which I value tremendously. I feel very lucky to have found this place. Everybody is so kind.”