Agency update from the CEO

Welcome back to the MERIL newsletter. I would like to share with you some changes we have made to our services in the nine-county area of Northwest Missouri.

Since I became the CEO of MERIL, we have taken steps to streamline our organization. As a result, Angels Home Health was sold to The Whole Person, a Center for Independent Living (CIL) in the Kansas City area. We are pleased that the nurses and director continue to share our office space in St. Joseph and provide home health services in Northwest Missouri.

In addition, we discontinued our Bridge Interpreting services on June 30. There are a number of qualified interpreting agencies in the area, and we are confident these agencies can meet the needs of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community members that we have been honored to serve. We are glad many of them are able to join us for our biweekly “silent lunch” peer support group.

With these changes, MERIL is now positioned to focus on providing Independent Living services (IL), Consumer Directed Services (CDS), and In-Home services. We continue to provide CDS services to over 300 participants in Northwest Missouri, and we recently expanded our In-Home program to Nodaway County (in addition to Buchanan and Andrew counties). We provide aid to those who need equipment and other support through our Consumer Assistance Fund, and our youth services and nursing home transition services, including the Money Follows the Person program, will continue to help people live independently in their own homes and communities.

MERIL, like the other 21 CILs in Missouri, receives a lion’s share of its revenue from (a.) the state, in the form of the IL Grant from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and (b.) the CDS funds from Medicaid. This year the Missouri legislature made many cuts to the services that CILs provide. We are preparing for the damaging effects of these cuts, and we are determined to respond in a way that guarantees our core services will be available to those who need them.

Our core services are: (1.) information and referral, (2.) independent living skills training, (3.) transition services (youth and nursing home), (4.) peer support, and (5.) advocacy. MERIL has provided these core services for over 23 years as Northwest Missouri’s Center for Independent Living, and we will continue to do so well into the future.

- Rob Honan, CEO since January 2017

Solar Eclipse Fundraiser

The eclipse on August 21 is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. And we have the perfect spot!

- Directly in the path of totality in St. Joseph, MO
- Less than 1/4 mile from the Highway (to avoid traffic)
- Accessible indoor bathrooms, ice machine, camping space
- Near 24-hour stores (Walmart, McDonald’s, gas stations)

Reserve your spot today!

Minimum donation:
- $ 20 per parking spot
- $ 40 per night if camping

All proceeds directly help people with disabilities live independently.

Follow us for the latest news:
Facebook.com/MERIL4U
Twitter.com/MERIL4U
Advocacy update from the CEO

Recently, two landmark laws that greatly assist people with disabilities celebrated anniversaries: The ADA recently celebrated its 27th anniversary and the Social Security Amendments Act of 1965, which created Medicaid, had its 52nd birthday.

These critical laws became reality through a combination of direct action and civil disobedience, legislative work, media presence and common sense explanations that society is better off when we include everyone. After all, no one group, ethnicity, political party, rural/urban resident, etc. is immune from disability and at any time could need the civil rights protections that the ADA gives or the health care that Medicaid provides.

On the federal level, there has been an effort to severely curtail Medicaid through potential funding cuts and block grants to the states. If you have been watching the news in the last month, many disability rights activists protested against in U.S. Senators’ offices the very real threats of these cuts—and these protestors are the real heroes in our movement because they were able to show and convince Congress not to pass the most recent attack on Medicaid.

Medicaid is a “pro-life” issue, and is an essential tool that allows people to live at home. It is imperative that it remain and I applaud those that made sure Congress knew how valuable Medicaid is for many persons with disabilities. Advocacy: One of the five core services, and arguably the most important, works!

- Rob Honan, CEO

Deaf & Hard of Hearing Update

Hello! I just wanted to give everyone a quick update on services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. I am still working for MERIL on an as-needed basis for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. Silent Lunches have been put on hold until the fall.

If you have a personal need, please contact me for an appointment. I am offering office hours on some Sundays and possibly on weekdays. Please text or email to schedule ahead of time: 816-785-5963 or angieb@meril.org. I am also available to take VP calls at 816-396-0738.

- Angie Barba, IL Specialist for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Thank you! And Help Needed!

The CDS and In-Home programs are vital to people who wish to live an independent lifestyle since they allow individuals to stay in their own homes and maintain dignity, independence, and be a part of the community.

The vast majority of us would prefer to be in our own homes and in charge of our own lives. In order to successfully live in the community, we all need assistance of some kind.

For those on the CDS and In-Home programs, personal care attendants, nurses, and attendants are all an essential part of the equation. Without these valuable workers, the options for community living would not be as plentiful.

We are always looking for those “unsung heroes” – those attendants and caregivers who want to make a difference. If you or someone you know is interested in helping out, we are hiring for flexible hours for the over 350 CDS and In-Home participants.

Please call us at 816-279-8558 for more information.

Newsletter alert: Keep your eye out for a “Featured Attendant” of the month which will be in a future newsletter.
Helping people with disabilities and people who are aging live independently in Northwest Missouri.

MERIL nets $3,400 in solar eclipse fundraiser!

August 21st was a day that MERIL and St. Joseph will never forget. It was the day of the highly anticipated solar eclipse, the first total solar eclipse in the continental United States since 1979. For months prior to the event, MERIL staff had been diligently planning for the “once in a lifetime” event. The months of planning paid off. MERIL staff started taking reservations in May and slowly as the summer progressed, we received more and more. The staff worked with the city, county, its neighbors, and the media to make sure all the “i’s” were dotted and the “t’s” were crossed.

On the Saturday and Sunday before the event, MERIL hosted individuals and families from over 12 states and one foreign country. The scene was like a mini festival. Hot dogs and coffee were sold, as were raffle tickets for a 40” TV. People were mingling with people from all over the United States and it was a blast. Though the day of the eclipse did not produce the sunny sky that we had hoped for, enthusiasm remained high. The two-plus minutes of darkness, even under the cover of clouds, was pretty cool.

- Rob Honan, CEO

Welcome to MERIL!

You may see a new face when you stop by the MERIL office in St. Joseph. Please join us in welcoming one of our new receptionists: Erin Sullivan!

Erin is passionate about supporting people who need assistance.

“I want to help anyone who needs help the best way I know how,” she said.

We are excited to have her on the MERIL team!

More pictures at Facebook.com/MERIL4U

Support our mission! You can do small things right now to help people with disabilities. Learn more at www.meril.org/help.
Advocacy and Voting: The Connection

MERIL provides five core services, with advocacy being one of, if not, the most important service we offer. Advocacy can take two primary forms: personal and systems.

Personal advocacy means using information and laws to fight for oneself on the job, in housing, in transportation, and even at the store. Personal advocacy boils down to sticking up for yourself — using the tools of information and the law.

Systems advocacy is fighting for what is right and selling an idea to members of the legislature, city council, or Congress. Systems advocacy means that citizens work with and advocate to elected bodies in order to enact societal change. These are the laws that govern society and they come from lawmakers.

The individuals who make the laws arrive at city hall, the statehouse, and Congress by one method: elections. It is us, the citizens, who vote these lawmakers into power. Advocacy and voting are inextricably intertwined. In order to get our preferred bills passed so that they may become laws, the first step is REGISTERING to vote. There are several ways to do this:

1. Contact Jay Claywell, MERIL voter registration deputy, (2.) go to the Buchanan County Clerk’s office and fill out a registration form (bring a photo ID), or (3.) contact the MO Secretary of State’s office: GoVoteMissouri.com or 800-669-8683. You must be registered to vote by October 11th for the November 7th election.

And, once you are actually registered to vote, go vote! There is an old saying that goes something like this: “You don’t have a license to complain if you don’t vote.” So go and make your voice heard.

CDS attendant Lanena McPherson goes “above and beyond”

This month we would like to shine a spotlight on attendant Lanena McPherson.

Lanena has worked for her current MERIL CDS participant for almost six years. When asked what her greatest quality was, the participant said that she is always nice to everyone and very helpful, even on days the participant may be grumpy. The participant has experienced some health concerns, including surgery, over the past six years and stated that Lanena is always there for him. He said Lanena goes above and beyond as his attendant, and this allows him to remain independent.

From all of us here at MERIL, thank you for working so hard and supporting our mission to help those who have a disability or who are aging remain in their home and live as independently as they choose!

Find out how to become an attendant: www.meril.org/cds.

Assistive Technology: Tools for Independent Living

One thing that many people do not know about MERIL is that we provide Assistive Technology Services. These services are important because they help people in a wide variety of ways such as establishing or continuing independent living.

For example, what happens when a person who communicates by telephone experiences hearing loss? He or she is no longer able to communicate effectively by telephone. There are many devices which will give that independence back, such as amplified telephones or captioned telephones. There are devices and services that can assist with deafness, blindness, low vision, learning disabilities, safety and mobility, and many other things. We at MERIL can help arrange demonstrations and trials of devices so that people can make informed decisions about what best suits their needs.

In future additions of our newsletter we will feature services, devices, and first-hand testimonials about how people’s lives have improved by learning how to use assistive technology to their advantage. In the meantime, feel free to call with any questions you may have regarding Assistive Technology Services.
Helping people with disabilities and people who are aging live independently in Northwest Missouri.

About this issue: A message from Executive Director Rob Honan

October has long been one of my favorite months. The days are cooling off, football (both kinds: soccer and American) is in full swing, we are in the middle of the baseball playoffs (next year, Royals), the leaves will soon be falling, and the holidays are looming, especially Halloween. And here at MERIL we are bustling with activities and providing resources to people so they can live fuller lives.

This edition of our newsletter highlights what the busy MERIL staff have been doing recently.

Lisa Gabriel provided two articles: Youth Pre-Employment Summer Program and a recap of the Real Voices, Real Choices conference.

There is a brief article about service animals and some excellent information from the Governor’s Council on Disability.

Jay Claywell contributed the “featured attendant” segment this month, and Paul Bergonzoni discusses one of the devices in our assistive technology room.

National Disability Employment Awareness Month is celebrated each October, and we have provided some resources for workplace inclusion.

As always, we welcome your feedback and look forward to seeing you in the future. MERIL is proud to serve Northwest Missouri.

It’s National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)!

As a Center for Independent Living, more than half of MERIL’s board members and staff have a disability.

We know the importance of inclusion in the workplace, and we have seen many examples of how simple workplace accommodations can allow an employee’s abilities to emerge, letting them fully contribute to an organization or company.

MERIL can provide education and advice for businesses and other organizations regarding workplace accommodations, ADA compliance, emergency preparedness for people with disabilities, health and safety resources, and more.

Please call us for more information. You can also learn a lot from these featured resources:

It’s National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)! 

Support our mission! You can do small things right now to help people with disabilities. Learn more at www.meril.org/help.
CDS attendant Mary Jo Tapp provides reliable and kind support

This month we would like to shine a spotlight on attendant Mary Jo Tapp.

Mary Jo has worked for her sister (a MERIL CDS participant) for 10 years, and the participant said she values their close relationship.

“Mary Jo cares for me,” she said. “More than that though, she cares for everyone and tries very hard to be as helpful and kind to everyone she meets. She is a very kindhearted person.”

In addition to Mary Jo’s compassion, the participant said she respects her integrity.

“Mary Jo is very honest,” she said. “She always comes back from an errand with a receipt so that I can keep track of my finances. She is my sister and she loves me, so I know she’d never be anything less than honest with me, but her honesty is very admirable.”

Like all CDS attendants, Mary Jo provides personal care services so the participant can live independently in her own home.

“Mary Jo helps me with the things that my heart condition and my arthritis keep me from doing,” the participant said. “Mary Jo helps me with little things like putting my socks on and keeping my hair neat and clean. Mary Jo also helps me with things like taking a bath and makes sure I am safe while doing so. There are times also, when I need her to go to the store or around town paying bills for me and she does these things for me too.”

Jay Claywell, the MERIL CDS specialist who works with the participant, said Mary Jo and the participant are a great team.

“This participant/attendant pairing have been together longer than I have worked at MERIL,” he said.

“Over the course of my tenure at MERIL, I have seen the participant’s health and mobility ebb and flow as the years have passed. Sometimes, simple things like the weather get in her way, slowing her down. Despite the participant’s challenges, the constant in her life has been her sister, CDS attendant, Mary Jo Tapp. Mary Jo and the participant work together to ensure that the participant’s CDS service plan is delivered in such a way that her independence is maintained at a level that the participant has grown accustomed to over the last decade. This pair is a shining example of the effectiveness of the CDS and IL programs here at MERIL.”

To find out more about the MERIL CDS program, including how to become an attendant, visit www.meril.org/cds.

Service animals are a valuable resource for people with disabilities

The use of service animals is a necessity for many people with disabilities.

Service animals must be trained to perform a task for an individual with a disability. Emotional support animals are not trained to perform a task and only provide comfort to an individual.

There are also different laws that govern training and what is acceptable in public accommodations (stores, hotels, doctors’ offices, etc.) and in housing.

The Missouri Governor’s Council on Disability (GCD) has published an excellent and informative video outlining some important concepts around service animals.

You can find this information on the GCD website: http://disability.mo.gov/serviceanimals.htm.

In addition, if you are in the St. Joseph TV viewing area, Laura Mueth from the GCD will be the featured guest on KQ2’s “Live at Five” TV show on October 10 at 5:00 p.m. She will bring her service animal, Syler, for a short demonstration and will talk about service animals.

MERIL appears on Live at Five on the second Tuesday of each month. Captioned videos of our segments are available on our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/pg/MERIL4U/videos/.
People First members attend Real Voices, Real Choices conference

Participants from People First of St. Joseph and MERIL staff members attended the Real Voices, Real Choices conference in August. The conference featured several events and resources for people with disabilities, including information about self-advocacy, employment, healthy living, and social support.

Lisa Gabriel, from MERIL, said attending the conference was a fulfilling experience. “This conference was an amazing way to help people with disabilities celebrate who they are and connect with others, learn about topics that can help them through life, as well as meeting new friends,” she said. “People participated in activities such as bingo, karaoke, and movie night, which gave them the opportunity to relax and socialize with others. This is a fantastic conference that happens every year, and I am so honored to share such an impactful learning experience.”

More information about the conference can be found here: https://dmh.mo.gov/constituentservices/consumerconference.html

People First Self-Advocacy Group
People First is a non-profit self-advocacy organization formed by and facilitated by people with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

There are two People First chapters in Northwest Missouri, in St. Joseph and in Maryville.

For more information about People First, visit: www.missouripeoplefirst.org

Our assistive technology demonstration site is open for public use

At MERIL’s main office in St. Joseph, we have an assistive technology demonstration site that is open to the public.

This demonstration site allows people to try out a wide variety of assistive devices—such as phones and computer equipment—so they can find a device that is a good fit for them.

This month we are featuring our Clearview digital magnifier. You can use this device for things like paying your bills, reading the news, and other things that might otherwise be difficult to do because of small print and picture size.

This magnifier has several features besides just magnification that make reading easier and more enjoyable.

In addition, you can use our computer lab for access to the Internet.

When you visit our office, we will demonstrate these items so that you can see how easy they can be to use. We will also discuss possible financial assistance for purchasing a device.

In future newsletters, we will feature “give-away” assistive devices. We often accept and find new homes for donated assistive devices so that people who may not have room in their budget can get a needed item for free.
MERIL provides pre-employment training for youth with disabilities

This summer, Lisa Gabriel, MERIL’s Youth Services and Transitions Specialist, coordinated our first Career Exploration summer program for youth with disabilities.

The program ran for seven weeks, and featured a weekly workshop often led by a guest presenter.

Lynette Saxton, Program Manager for SJC Marketing, led a discussion about the importance of matching your personality traits to your career interests. Students also learned skills related to professional interactions and goal setting.

Cindy Wells, from the University of Missouri Extension office in St. Joseph, provided tips for online job searching and for successful resume building. Students then completed a mock online job application to practice these skills.

MERIL’s Chief Human Resources Officer, Deann Young, conducted a mock job interview with the students, explaining to them what an employer would be looking for and giving them personalized feedback.

Beforehand, the students learned how to prepare for an interview, including wearing appropriate attire, researching the company before the interview, and anticipating some common interview questions.

Lisa Warner, from the University of Missouri Extension Hook Center, discussed strategies for advocating for yourself and for others in the working world. She also informed students about self-advocating in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting, as well as information about other resources and supports.

MERIL provides youth transition services throughout the year, and we are looking forward to another career exploration program next summer.

For more information about youth services, contact:

Lisa Gabrielson
LisaG@meril.org
816-279-8558

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Career Exploration Summer Program 2018

Eligibility Requirements

To participate, the student must:

- be 16-21 years old
- be currently enrolled in high school with plans to return to high school in Fall 2018
- have an education plan (IEP or 504)
- be motivated to learn about the career process!

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RSVP for our Nov. 2 networking luncheon!

Thank you to everyone who attended our Andrew/Buchanan County networking luncheon on September 7.

These luncheons are a great way for members of social service organizations, public officials, and other members of the Northwest Missouri community to connect and share information.

If you would like to attend the Atchison County networking luncheon in Fairfax on November 2, please RSVP before October 25 by emailing us at meril@meril.org.

MERIL is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization 4420 S 40th St., St. Joseph, MO 64503 816-279-8558 www.meril.org
About this issue: A message from Executive Director Rob Honan

As MERIL is rapidly moving into the holidays, with Thanksgiving just around the corner, I am pleased to present another edition of the MERIL newsletter. I hope that you enjoy it.

In this edition, the Rehabilitation Council for the Blind’s Public Forum, the Assistive Technology Spotlight, the In-home program, and the “Featured Attendant” are all featured.

And I want to make special mention of the home visit that Russell Gilfillan did with participant Amber Olney in Maryville, with State Senator Dan Hegeman as a special guest. The education for Senator Hegeman will go a long way going into the General Assembly in January.

As always, please share this newsletter and give us feedback. We always like to hear from our readers, and we welcome you to sign up to receive our newsletters via email.

Our newsletters are posted on our website (www.meril.org/news) and on our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/meril4u).

CDS participant demonstrates self-advocacy with Sen. Dan Hegeman

CDS participant Amber Olney (right) speaks to Sen. Dan Hegeman (left) about home and community-based services for people with disabilities.

MERIL CDS specialist Russell Gilfillan joins the conversation.

One of MERIL’s core services is advocacy. We advocate on behalf of people with disabilities, and we promote self-advocacy by people with disabilities. Please contact us to learn more about our advocacy efforts.
We recognize CDS attendants Debora Simerly and Connie Thomsen!

This month we would like to spotlight two sisters who take exceptional care of their mother.

Debora Simerly and Connie Thomsen are fantastic attendants for their mother Virginia. Virginia said the girls are very close and know that Virginia’s preference is to stay away from the hospital and nursing home.

Virginia praised them for their flexibility, honesty, and willingness to learn new things such as assisting with dressing wounds. She said the biggest blessing she feels from having her daughters serve as her attendants is that they always do what is best for her.

Like other CDS attendants, Debora and Connie provide services such as personal care, housekeeping, and transportation so Virginia can remain independent in her home. What is exceptional about this pair is that they are a solid team, alternating their work weeks to share the responsibilities and care of their mother.

Virginia said she is happy to have the girls available to do things that she can’t see well enough to do or move around well enough to do for herself.

Virginia knows all about teamwork, as it really runs in her blood. She was born a triplet (two girls and one boy) and has five daughters of her own. She said she has instilled a lot of love and work ethic into her daughters and grandchildren, which makes them perfect candidates to work for her.

The attendants said they appreciate being compensated for their work and the flexibility of the job, but above all they are very passionate about making sure their mother is well taken care of.

Visit [www.meril.org/cds](http://www.meril.org/cds) to find out more about MERIL’s CDS program, including how to become an attendant.

Did you know MERIL has an assistive technology recycling program?

That’s right. We accept items that are no longer of use to their previous owners, test them, and make them available at no cost to people who can benefit from them.

Featured this month are phone devices for people who are hard of hearing. For example, the Watchman signaling system causes a lamp to turn on when a telephone rings so that someone who has trouble hearing will be alerted that a call is coming in.

We have several devices for people with low vision, low hearing, and other disabilities. If you think we might have something that would be helpful to you, or if you would like to donate an item that you no longer need, just call or stop by.
In-home nurse visits keep patient healthy and independent at home

Tiffany Diaz, LPN, and Roy Dalbey exemplify the success of MERIL’s In-Home Services program.

Roy has received in-home nurse visits from MERIL for almost a year. He receives weekly help setting up his medications and doing vital sign checks, and he receives monthly diabetic toenail care.

Roy said he appreciates the consumer-based nature of MERIL’s In-Home Services program, which focuses on patients’ independence and control over their own medical treatment.

Roy said he likes receiving medical assistance in his own home instead of in a hospital or a nursing home. He said his nurse Tiffany is “terrific” and “goes above and beyond for me and my needs.”

Roy said he would “definitely” recommend the In-Home Services program because Tiffany provides good medical care, and she is respectful and professional.

We know that people are happier and healthier when they are able to maintain their independence in their own homes. We would want that for ourselves and our family members, and we want people to know that these options may be available to them.

MERIL provides in-home nurse visits to patients who live in Andrew, Buchanan, and Nodaway counties.

Visit www.meril.org/in-home to learn more about our In-Home Services program, including patient eligibility requirements.

MERIL hosts public forum for Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

MERIL hosted a public forum held by the Missouri State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind on November 2.

MERIL’s Rob Honan (above) and Paul Bergonzoni (below) speak to the council and attendees.
Helping people with disabilities and people who are aging live independently in Northwest Missouri.

December 2017

This Year at MERIL: A message from Executive Director Rob Honan

December is a time of reflection, a time to spend with family and friends, and a time to reflect on the past year.

This year has seen a great deal of change at MERIL. Since the beginning of the year, two large parts of MERIL, Angels Home Health and Bridge Interpreting, are no longer part of the MERIL family.

In addition, state budget cuts have significantly impacted the Independent Living and the Consumer Directed Services programs.

Yet, our staff has responded by being more creative and assertive in its approach to service delivery. We are implementing more grassroots marketing techniques and thinking outside the box on how to keep existing participants and attract new ones in the CDS and In-Home programs.

On the Independent Living side, our staff has responded by providing the community with a great deal of information on the “Live at Five” television program, implementing a strong “Silent Lunch” for Deaf and Hard of Hearing participants in the community, and continuing to provide resources to thousands of people, groups, businesses, and government entities in Northwest Missouri and around the state.

I am blessed to have a great staff, board, and community that supports Independent Living. I am looking forward to a productive 2018.

Happy Holidays everybody!

People First self-advocacy group decks the halls at East Hills Mall

On December 2, the People First self-advocacy group rang the bell for Salvation Army to collect funds to help people have a better Christmas this year.

The group had a great time greeting customers entering the mall as they started off with singing Christmas carols: Jingle Bells, Silent Night, Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, and their favorite – Deck the Halls with Boughs of Holly!

Everyone had a chance to sport that glowing apron, ring those blissful bells, and greet people with an exciting, “Merry Christmas!”

Lisa Gabriel and Sharon Courter from MERIL assisted the group. They said People First is a phenomenal group, and there is nothing they would rather do than spend the day with such wonderful people.

Front (from left to right): People First members Gary, Chris, Lydia, Charlie, and Leona. Back: MERIL advisor Sharon Courter.

Support our mission! You can do small things right now to help people with disabilities. Learn more at www.meril.org/help.
MERIL’s Thrivent Action Team supports the Veterans Sundry Drive

Our Thrivent Action Team at MERIL took part in a community project this month to support veterans by purchasing and donating items to Red Cross for the Veterans Sundry Drive.

The team—led by Ron Gabriel—purchased clothing, personal care, comfort, and recreational items. And we had a great time shopping!

Veterans—many of whom have disabilities—are near and dear to our hearts. We are fortunate that we are able to help them with their independent living needs.

We would like to thank Thrivent and Red Cross for their contributions, and we would especially like to thank all of the veterans in our community. We appreciate you!

Front (from left to right): Shawn Appleby, Ashley Nichols, and Monica Boeh.
Back (from left to right): Rachael McElvain, Ron Gabriel, Lauren Lynch, Lisa Gabriel, and Liz Alder.

Stay up to date with the latest news, events, and resources: Facebook.com/meril4u Twitter.com/meril4u
We at MERIL wish you and your family a happy holiday season!