New superintendent worked her way to the top

Michele Giess knows Richland Newhope well. In fact, except for a part-time job in high school, it’s the only place she has ever worked.

Twenty-eight years later, Michele is running the agency. In January, she became superintendent – the eighth person to hold the position since the Richland County Board of Developmental Disabilities assumed operations of Richland Newhope in 1967.

Michele, who previously served as the director of the agency’s Service and Support Administration (SSA), says she likes to “jump in with both feet” when starting a new position, so the past few months have been very busy.
Your new DD Board members

The Richland County Board of Developmental Disabilities (RCBDD) welcomed two new members in January. Nicolas Comstock and Amanda Chapman were appointed to four-year terms. Both say they are excited for the new challenge.

Nicolas ‘Nick’ Comstock
Nick is a relatively new resident of Richland County, having moved here less than three years ago from northwest Indiana – just about 20 minutes outside of Chicago. He attended a private Christian school, receiving a certificate of attendance in 2009. He also attended a bible college for one year.

He has five brothers, including his identical twin brother, Nathan.

“Let it be known I’m the better-looking one, and I am the older twin by one minute,” Nick exclaims.

Goodwill helps people become employed

(Editor’s Note: The following is part of a series of stories about the provider partners that work with Richland Newhope who offer services for people with developmental disabilities in Richland County.)

In 2017 Goodwill Industries of Akron, serving Richland, Summit, Portage, Medina, and Ashland Counties, helped nearly 9,400 individuals seeking employment with training and job placement services.

The work experience program is one of the training services offered. It was first introduced to Richland County about 10 years ago at a retail site in Ontario and has now expanded to a store on Lexington Avenue.)
Currently, about 18 individuals are part of the program.

“We use all of our stores as a training site where the participants come and learn the work skills,” says Erin Grzegorek, manager of Mission & Career Services. “Our focus is for us to really help someone learn the soft skills necessary for them to be able to go out and get a job in whatever field they would like to pursue.”