Dr. Joseph Ferrara

Dr. Joseph Ferrara has been named the 2014 “Alum of the Year” by Utah State University’s Center for Persons with Disabilities.

Ferrara was a graduate research assistant from 1976-1978, did post-doctoral study in 1983-1984, and was an associate research professor from 1984-1991. He left the CPD for a position at the North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities at Minot State University.

“In 1988, an old friend from graduate school, Steve Ragan, called from Minot and asked if he could use my vita in a proposal for a new University Affiliated Program,” Ferrara said. University Affiliated Programs are now called University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDs).

Ferrara told his friend the proposal wouldn’t have much chance of funding and forgot about it. The proposal failed, but Ragan revised it and resubmitted it. When it was approved, Ragan offered Ferrara a job in Minot. Ferrara said he wasn’t interested.

“When I got home, I told my wife Alane that Steve had called and offered me a job,” Ferrara said. “She asked if the North Dakota job would involve much travel. When I said that there would be little or no travel, she produced a calendar that showed that my work at the CPD had taken me away from home way too many times.”

They made the move from Utah to North Dakota.

“When I came to Minot, in the fall of 1991, the North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities had two full-time employees,” Ferrara said. “When Steve’s proposal was funded, it more than doubled the University’s overall soft-money budget. Working with great people, to build NDCPD into a viable member of the UCEDD network, was a labor of love.”

Ferrara retired from NDCPD in 2012 as associate director of development. He was also a faculty member in the Department of Communication Disorders and Special Education.

He recently reflected on his time at Utah State University.

“After I had sold my home in Logan, and moved my family to Minot, I came back to Logan to complete my final two weeks as a USU employee,” he said. “During that time, CPD staff and faculty felt sorry for me and could not fight a compulsion to feed me. In those two weeks I was fed by friends, attended going away parties every night, and gained 15 pounds. I’ll always cherish the memory of the kindness of my CPD family.”