

HORIZONS

SOUTH CAROLINA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION DEPARTMENT

2006 Client Achievement Award winner doesn't let disability hamper his dreams

Someday people with physical disabilities will be able to hunt, fish and enjoy all of nature's amenities in a barrier-free, fully equipped, bed-and-breakfast tucked away in a remote, scenic wilderness area.

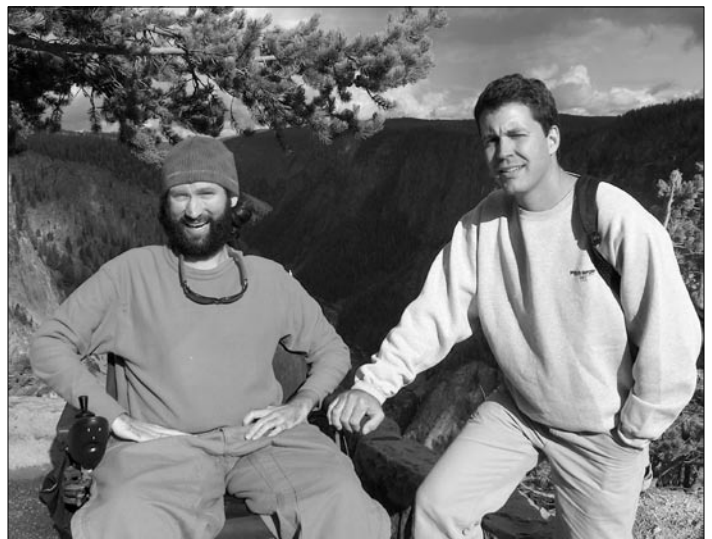
Ryan Jennings, an avid outdoorsman, dreams of building and operating that haven, and no one who knows him doubts that he can pull that off if he so chooses.

The 25-year-old Jennings was recently honored as the 2006 Client Achievement Award winner at the annual conference of the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Association.

Jennings, who has spinal muscular atrophy, is employed in the pharmaceutical sales business.

As a high-achieving and active Lexington High School student, Jennings needed assistance in making his school surroundings more accessible and in planning for transition to employment. SCVRD rehabilitation engineer Tom Jackman made recommendations to the school, which made it easier for Jennings to navigate the campus in his wheelchair.

He took part in the summer program for students at SCVRD's Center for Comprehensive Programs to assess



Ryan Jennings with a friend on a trip to Wyoming.

his physical capabilities and get a vocational evaluation.

"It's important to get VR involved early, because things take time," said Carol Jennings, Ryan's mother.

"That gives the school and the team time, maybe two or three years, that they can actually plan together for that child's next step."

Roy Hewett, now Lexington area supervisor, was Jennings' counselor early on and quickly noted "...his independence, his desire to do things despite the fact that he has a disability, because that just does not hold him back."

With scholarships and other resources, including some assistance from VR, Jennings enrolled at Presbyterian College, which also made some accessibility improvements to accommodate his attendance. He earned a degree in biology while also working as an athletic trainer.

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Enabling eligible South Carolinians with Disabilities to prepare for, achieve and maintain competitive employment.

Commissioner honors two with Medals of Excellence

Jennie Thomas, Spartanburg area supervisor, and Mia Howard, Information Technology project specialist, each received the Commissioner's Medal of Excellence.



Thomas

Thomas, who started with VR in 1989, has shown "a commitment to our clients and the philosophy and mission of our department," said Commissioner Larry Bryant in presenting the medal.

He cited her initiative to learn Spanish so she could be more effective with the growing Hispanic/Latino population; her ability to lead through change;

and the relationships she has built with legislators and community leaders.

Howard has been with the agency for three years. During that time, she "has had a tremendous impact in a very short time," Bryant said.



Howard

She has played an integral part in developing the new Case Management System, demonstrating the ability to look at the big picture and envision how all the different program parts work together.

Bryant said the new system will "improve the quality of services we are able to provide our clients."

DDS named tops in region

The South Carolina Disability Determination Services program was named DDS of the Year in the eight-state Atlanta Region.

Paul Barnes, the Social Security Administration's Atlanta regional commissioner, bestows the honor each year. South Carolina was named first in quality, processing time and production. Other states in the region are Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, North Carolina and Kentucky.

In quality, or accuracy, DDS scored 98 percent, while the national average was 95.6 percent and the regional average was 96 percent.

Processing time was 70.2 days, while the national average was 88.6

days and the regional average was 84.6 days.

In production, DDS scored 109.8 percent, while the national average was 103.6 percent and the national average was 99.1 percent.

In addition, DDS doctors from South Carolina assisted other states by doing medical evaluations in some of their cases.

"I believe the streamlining changes we've made over the last couple of years have been directly responsible for this success," said SCVRD Commissioner Larry Bryant in recognizing the honor.

Those changes included converting to an electronic file; introducing a dual monitor system; and centralizing bill payment in West Columbia.

Areas honor their business partners

Lowe's stores in Sumter and Camden, ARAMARK in Rock Hill and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (National Weather Service) office in Greenville received Business Partner Awards during the conference.

Lowe's has been an outstanding business partner for several years. In Lexington, Lowe's manager Ed Comer has supported the VR program, calling when vacancies occur at the store. The store has hired several clients with significant disabilities and has made accommodations to help them become successful employees.

In Camden, three former VR clients are working at the Lowe's store.

Lowe's is a charter member of the VR Business Partnership Network and Willie Fuller, area human resources manager, has served as president of the BPN.

ARAMARK's facility at Winthrop University in Rock Hill has hired about 20 VR clients for the food service operation over the past three years. The staff does a



Dr. H. Lucius Laffitte, right, vice chairman of the S.C. State Agency of Vocational Rehabilitation, shows off the Lowe's Business Partner Award. From left are Roy Hewett, Lexington area supervisor; Chris Hoopengarden, Willie Fuller and Lowell Person, all of Lowe's; and John Hornsby, seated, SCVRD Sumter-Camden area supervisor.

great job helping clients learn their jobs and feel welcome. In addition, ARAMARK uses VR's Job Retention Services to help employees with disabling conditions maintain their jobs.

The National Weather Service office at Greenville-Spartanburg Airport has been a leader in helping launch the High School/ High Tech program, which exposes student

with disabilities to technology-based careers. NOAA has provided two internships so far at the Greenville office.

Other business partner nominations included:

Aiken—The Barnwell People-Sentinel, which has partnered with

the Aiken office for the past six years.

The newspaper has provided an average of six community-based client evaluations a year and last year hired a VR client.

Anderson—Ulbrich Stainless Steel & Special Metals Inc., Westminster Division. Since 2003, Ulbrich has contracted with VR for clients to remove and strip wire from spools.

Salvaged wire is used in aircraft and aerospace vehicles, automotive components and medical equipment.

Berkeley-Dorchester—Goodwill Industries of Lower South Carolina. Since January of last year, Goodwill has employed more than 20 VR clients in various positions throughout the tri-county area.

Charleston—The Sheraton North Hotel. The hotel has hired at least 17 VR clients in various positions over the last year. When vacancies occur, the hotel staff looks to VR clients to fill them. If a problem arises, VR staff members help work out solutions.

Conway—EBTRON, an airflow measurement industry. VR clients at the Conway Work Training Center produce about 150 to 200 heating and air-conditioning cables a week for the company.

Florence—Palmetto Packaging. The company has supported the VR program since 1975. An average of 29 clients per month work on tasks for Palmetto Packaging at the Florence Work Training Center. The company also has hired two clients.

Laurens-Greenwood—Asten Johnson of Clinton. The company supplies products for the pulp and



Dr. Laffitte presents Chris Averett of ARAMARK with the Business Partner Award.

See **Partners**, page 7

Local case staffers earn recognition

Aiken

Dennis Sauls, Luanna Dygas, Jan Westmoreland, Vilroy Smith, Kathy Murray, Robin Taylor, John McMurtrie, George Sessions and Joe Powell were recognized for their work with a client who has mild mental retardation.

The client received a wide array of services and the staff was very involved in helping him find a home, furniture and clothing. He is successfully employed as a custodian with a contractor.

Anderson

Jim Keogh, Jackie Nelson, Melissa Hegler and Greg Beatty were recognized for their work with a client who has a mental disability and articulation problems.

The client had received Social Security benefits from age 6 until age 18. She had never worked before she came to the Anderson VR office. Following VR services, she is employed as a housekeeper.

Beaufort-Walterboro

Gail Murray and John Gallagher of the Beaufort office and the staffs of the Evaluation Center and Rehabilitation Technology were recognized for their work with a client who was born without arms and has legs of different lengths.

The client spent a summer at the Evaluation Center, participating in vocational assessment, career exploration and job-readiness classes.

He applied to and was accepted by Clemson University, where he majored in mechanical engineering. Rehabilitation Technology provided a laptop computer with the necessary accommodations and VR also provided assistance with tuition and related school costs.

He is employed as an automotive engineer.

Berkeley-Dorchester

Kelly Overholser, John Wilson, Freda Washington and Elaine Ellington of the Berkeley-Dorchester office and the Rehabilitation Technology staff were recognized for their work with a woman who has a progressive muscular disability and lymphedema.

The client, who uses a power wheelchair, is employed as a police dispatcher. Transportation became an issue when she had to purchase a van to travel to and from work.

VR provided job supports and helped her obtain a wheelchair lift and hand controls for her van.

Charleston

Jakki Deas, Jennifer Jerome, Ginger Ash, Morgan Fancher, Deborah Johnson, Vivian Pinckney and Mary Hart were recognized for their work with a client who has multiple disabilities.

The client has mental disorders, diabetes and lupus. She had been out of work for 10 years and was receiving SSDI



Conway staff members were, from left, Johnathan Greene, Phil Davis, Cindy McKenzie, Mona King, Teresa Houston and Marty Graham

benefits. At VR, she was involved in career planning and employment services and job-readiness training to help her build work tolerance.

She is successfully employed as a marketing representative.

Conway

Teresa Houston, Phil Davis, Marty Graham, Johnathan Greene, Mona King and Cindy McKenzie were recognized for their work with a client who has a traumatic brain injury and seizure disorder.

Following VR services, the client is employed as a grocery store custodian.

Florence

Samantha Murray, Jan Psillos, Susan Jordan, Audrey Nowlin,



Charleston staff members were, from left, Vivian Pinckney, Jennifer Jerome, Jakki Deas, Deborah Johnson and Mary Hart.

Camilla Jones, Prince McGill, Elizabeth Parker, Obediah Kirven, Mike Harrelson and Susan Urquhart were honored for their work with a client who was depressed.

They provided services and worked closely with the client's mental health counselor to address his needs throughout his rehabilitation.

The client is employed as a kitchen worker at a restaurant.

Greenville

Mark Daniels and Cathy Jollie of the Greenville office, Marlise Guillerault, Jim Stroman, Debby Triplett and Birt Dowling of the Evaluation Center, Julie Jackman of the Muscular Development Center and Todd Batt of the Rehabilitation Technology staff were recognized for their work with a client who has a spinal cord injury.

The client was receiving SSDI when he came to VR. His injury limited his mobility, self-care ability and work tolerance.

Following VR services, he is working as a public relations representative.

Laurens-Greenwood

Steve Heape, Keith Stewart, Chad Ulmer, Arthur Kemp, Grace Ryan, Jim Williams and the Greenwood Work Training Center staff along with the Evaluation Center and the Rehabilitation Technology staffs were recognized for their work with a client who has paraplegia.

The client was injured in a motorcycle accident in 1996. Following VR services, he is employed at a local industry.

Marlboro-Hartsville

Sheila Gilbert, Emily Whitney, Melody Woodle, Sophia Streater, Stacy Bakas, Rick Fountain and Tim Russell of the Marlboro and Hartsville offices along with the Evaluation Center and

Rehabilitation Technology staffs were recognized for their work with a client who has muscular weakness and hearing loss.

After receiving VR services, the client is employed as a receptionist.

Orangeburg

Deborah McCarty, Bessie Dowling, Raymond Cooper and Ivory Canty were recognized for their work with a client whose right arm was amputated below the elbow.

Following VR services, the client is working as a cashier at a gas station.

Richland

Gardenia Coleman, Jan Campbell, Andrea Sinkler-Slaughter, Bernard Grant, Jody Varn, Jesse Farr, Joy Smith, Robert Taylor and Jeannine Gamble from the Richland area office and

Julie Jackman of the Muscular Development Center were recognized for their work with a client who has a mental disability.

The client has an eye for detail and after a successful community-based evaluation, he was hired as a shipping and receiving clerk for an area industry.

Rock Hill

Vickie Manning, Jon Robinson and Linda Ransom were recognized for their work with a client who has a mental disability.

The client's disability limits information retention and interaction with others, but after extensive job-readiness training, he is employed as a food service worker.

Spartanburg

Roland Salley, Belinda Gibbs, Cindy Sellars, Norma Grizzard, Jennie Thomas, Marlene Comer and Katie Sprouse of the Spartanburg office and Roy Hewett of the Information Technology Training Center were recognized for their work with a client who suffered a foot injury compounded by diabetes.

The client is employed as a geographic information systems (GIS) analyst.



Marlboro-Hartsville staff were, from left, Sophia Streater, Rick Fountain, Sheila Gilbert, Stacy Bakas, Emily Whitney, Tim Russell and Melody Woodle.

Sumter

Kim Ferguson of the Sumter office, Lee-Ann Danko, Janice Miller and Mary Burnett of the Evaluation Center and Barbara Jolly of the Muscular Development Center were recognized for their work with a man who has had polio since he was an infant.

VR provided services and assisted with post-secondary training at the University of South Carolina, where the client received a bachelor's degree in retail management.

He subsequently received a master's of business administration from East Carolina University and is employed as an assistant manager at a drug store.

Awards recognize special contributions

Several people who have had a special impact on the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department were recognized with awards during the conference.

Sen. Wes Hayes, R-Rock Hill, received the Legislative Award.

Hayes has been a supporter of the agency since his election to the S.C. House in 1984.

He was elected to the S.C. Senate in 1990 and is a member of the Senate Finance Committee, the Public Education Committee and the Medical Affairs Committee.

"In all of these roles, he has demonstrated a compassion for all people, especially people with disabilities," said Commissioner Larry Bryant in presenting the award.

Hayes recently sponsored a bill that established state standards for VR counselor education requirements, allowing the agency to avoid using federal standards that are much more restrictive and costly.

Dr. Lonnie Randolph, a Columbia optometrist, received Special Recognition for his long-time support of the agency.

Randolph, who also is state president of the NAACP, has worked with VR clients since shortly after he began his practice 30 years ago. He is very influential in the community and has been an



Hayes

SCVRD advocate with legislators and the governor.

Frances Looper of Lexington was recognized as VR Client Partner of the Year.

Client partners are former clients who support the agency by writing legislators, teaching classes, participating in panel discussions, identifying job opportunities and serving as mentors for other clients.

Looper, who is working as an administrative assistant for a car dealership, has been an active VR supporter in the Lexington area. She recently spoke at a West Columbia Chamber of Commerce meeting and during an SCVRD center managers meeting.

Sean Darcy, a 2006 high school graduate, received the Richard M. Kuffel Excellence in Education Award.

Darcy, of Greenville, became

involved in the High School/High Tech program in 2005 when he took an internship at the National Weather Service office at Greenville-Spartanburg Airport.

High School/High Tech exposes high school students with disabilities to career opportunities in technology-related fields.

Darcy, who has paraplegia following a car accident, so impressed officials at the Weather Service office that he was offered a job as a part-time student employee.

He has worked on a variety of projects, including a PowerPoint presentation on lightning safety for area school districts.

This year, he is enrolled at ITT Technical Institute where he is majoring in computer programming. He also has another internship with the Weather Service.



Looper



Darcy



Derle Lowder, seated, chairman of the S.C. State Agency of Vocational Rehabilitation, congratulates Dr. Lucius Laffitte on his 50 years of service on the SCVRD board. Laffitte, an Allendale physician, has been on the board since it was formed in 1957. Feb. 12 was Dr. Luke Laffitte Day at the SCVRA conference.



Randolph

SCVRA associations honor their own

Winners of the SCVRA association awards were:

Pat Green, area development director, received the Administrator of the Year Award from the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Administrators' Association.



Green

She was recognized for her leadership and mentoring skills.

"Her ability to coach new supervisors and managers has reaped vast rewards for the agency in the areas of productivity, stability and customer service for the clients of the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department," the nomination says.

Jim Stroman, career planning

and employment specialist at the Evaluation Center, received the Client Services Association Employee of the Year Award.

Stroman "consistently performs above and beyond expectations in delivering customer service," according to the nomination. He also was cited for being a team player, taking the initiative to help others and performing any duty asked of him without hesitation.



Stroman

Sam Hamilton, an information resources consultant, received the Technical Services Association Employee of the Year Award.

Hamilton was project leader

for the computer network in the new DDS Administration Building in West Columbia last year. The project spanned more than seven months and everything worked successfully the day the new building opened.

Hamilton also earned associate and senior state project manager certification last year, the only SCVRD employee to have done so.



Hamilton

Dr. Lisa Varner, a DDS psychologist in Greenville, received the Barry Cooper Leadership Award from the S.C. Association of Disability Examiners.

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Partners

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paper industry. Three to six clients a day at the Laurens Work Training Center cut cardboard packaging, salvage tubes and sew materials for Asten Johnson.

Marlboro—Stanley Tools. The company has supplied contract work to the Marlboro Work Training Center for 10 years. Five to 15 clients a day work on the contracts.

Orangeburg—Love's Travel Lodge. The company uses VR as a resource for potential employees.

Richland—Pontiac Foods of Pontiac. A subsidiary of the Kroger Corporation, Pontiac Foods produces dried prepared foods, specifically coffee and spices.

Clients at the Richland Work Training Center perform a variety of tasks for Pontiac, including product salvage and finished product display.

Spartanburg—Morrison's. The company operates the dining facilities at Spartanburg Regional Medical Center. Seven VR clients have been hired at the hospital location.

Walterboro—Floralife Inc. The company, which specializes in cut flower preservatives, provides on-



Dr. Laffitte presents the Business Partner Award to Vince DiCarlo, warning coordination meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Greenville. From left are David Turnipseed, Greenville area supervisor, and Kerry Reece, a Greenville counselor who works with the High School/High Tech program.

the-job training for some VR clients and has a representative on the VR Advisory Board in Walterboro.

Associations

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Varner is the only full-time psychological consultant in the Greenville Regional DDS office, serving medical consultants, examiners and supervisors. She assumed the primary role of training new examiners on the mental body system and took on the task of creating a new lesson plan and desk aids for new and experienced examiners.



Varner

She is the current president of SCADES and the S.C. Association of Professional Psychologists.

Ken Norris, DDS senior manager for administration, was named the Professional Staff Association's Professional of the Year.

Norris was recognized for spearheading the centralization of the DDS fiscal and consultative examination teams, which greatly enhanced efficiency and service.

He temporarily served as the supervisor in the Charleston Regional DDS office and also as the point man for the construction of the new administrative office and renovation of existing space.



Norris

He also found time to conduct training on conflict resolution and serves as a mentor to several new supervisors.



Ryan Jennings, center, with some of the SCVRD staff who worked on his case. They are, from left, Betsy Kliment, Roy Hewett, Todd Batt, Brenda Miller, Barbara Armstrong and Tom Jackman. Not pictured are Wanda Williamson, Julie Jackman, Barbara Jolly, Mary Ann Smith, Carol Teal, Marlise Guillerault, Janice Miller and Linda Menefee.

Jennings

Continued from page 1

As he prepared to find his niche in the workplace, Jennings needed to upgrade his transportation. Again he turned to the SCVRD rehabilitation technology staff for recommendations. Todd Batt worked closely with him and wrote the technical specifications for van modifications to maximize his mobility. The Department of Disabilities and Special Needs bid out the project using those specifications.

After graduation he found employment with a local pharmaceutical company and continued his studies, pursuing a master's degree in business. He has nearly completed work on that degree, and has his sights set on acceptance into a doctoral program.

"My heart is in the biological sciences," he said. He plans to pursue a degree in cellular



Jennings in his old van

molecular biology, with the intent to do research into spinal muscular atrophy, the condition that he and his younger sister Megan share.

Those are high-level goals, but there will still be room for hunting

See **Jennings**, page 12



Carol Anderson, left, and Susan Urquhart of Florence and Penny Bethea of Conway enjoy the Sunday night reception.



Dr. Iwanna Ridgill, the Tuesday motivational speaker, poses with Derle Lowder, chairman of the S.C. State Agency of Vocational Rehabilitation.



Tim Evatt, a member of the S.C. State Agency of Vocational Rehabilitation, chats with Deb Huff at the registration desk.

Around the conference



Incoming SCVRA President Jennie Thomas, left, presents outgoing President Pat Green with a plaque honoring her service.

John Hager, left, assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, Paul Barnes, Social Security Administration regional commissioner, and Dr. Blease Graham, political science professor at the University of South Carolina, were featured panelists on Tuesday morning.



Jeb Batten, Neal Getsinger and Linda Lieser mug for the camera.



The honor guard from Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School presents the colors.



Sen. Wes Hayes, R-Rock Hill, poses with Kathy Brownlee, Rock Hill area supervisor. Hayes received the Legislative Award.

Scenes from the Legislative Breakfast

The S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Association sponsored its annual Legislative Breakfast at the State House complex on March 1.

It was an opportunity for area supervisors and state office staff to greet their legislators and answer questions about issues pending on the legislative agenda that might affect the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department.

Here are some scenes from the breakfast.



Rep. Nikki Haley of Lexington, second from left, poses with Roy Hewett, Lexington area supervisor, Commissioner Larry Bryant, and Joanie Hess, Bryant's assistant.



Rep. Rex Rice of Easley talks with David Turnipseed, Greenville area supervisor.



Aiken Area Supervisor Jan Westmoreland tries out a Segway personal transporter belonging to Rep. Skipper Perry of Aiken.



Rep. Gilda Cobb-Hunter of Orangeburg makes a point to Area Development Director Kerry Mandeville, while Orangeburg Area Supervisor Ivory Canty looks on.



Rep. Alan Clemmons of Myrtle Beach with Penny Bethea, Conway area supervisor.



Area Development Director Neal Getsinger, left, talks with Rep. Seth Whipper of Charleston, center, and Charleston Area Supervisor Peter Zalka.

Jennings

continued from page 8

and fishing, at which he excels even though he says nature “wasn’t really designed accessible,” and perhaps to build the bed-and-breakfast that would be fully equipped to help others with disabilities enjoy the outdoors.

“I’m looking forward to seeing who Ryan Jennings is in the next five, ten or fifteen years,” said his most recent VR counselor, Brenda Miller. “I think he’s going to make a very serious contribution to society.”

“People with disabilities have some wonderful skills that our economy doesn’t always tap into,” said Jennings.

“Vocational Rehabilitation exists to help folks not only learn more about the skills they have, but also to find a way to mesh those skills with a career.”



Sean McKay, right, domestic tactical sales representative for North American Rescue Products, shows one of NARP’s casualty response kits to Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-SC. Graham recently visited the NARP operation at SCVRD’s Pelham Road Work Training Center in Greenville. With him are Darline Graham, an SCVRD business development specialist, and Bob Castellani, founder and president of NARP.

The South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department reports that it printed 5,300 copies of this newsletter at a cost of \$1,188, or about \$.22 a copy.

NEW
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