

HORIZONS

SOUTH CAROLINA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION DEPARTMENT

Pride, camaraderie mark ITTC graduation

Remnants of Tropical Storm Ida failed to dampen the pride or the camaraderie of the Information Technology Training Center students who accepted their certificates

Nov. 10 at an indoor ceremony on the State Office campus.

Cheers from the class went up as each graduate's name was called, a testimony to the bonds of friendship forged during their months of training.

Class speaker Jeff Ingram spoke of the support provided by the faculty and his classmates and the sense of family that develops as the students travel the road toward employment.



Bingham

As he gave the keynote address, Rep. Kenneth A. "Kenny" Bingham noted that graduation is "an exciting time of great accomplishment and ever greater opportunities for you."

"You have put the work in, you have completed the curriculum and now you have either gone to work or are about to, armed with a new set of skills that are built for today's workplace," he told the graduates.

Bingham, R-Lexington, applauded the graduates' determination and resourcefulness and praised their families for the sacrifices they had made.

He talked about potential and how elusive it can sometimes be.

"Looking at our graduates today, I see people who are well on their way to realizing their potential," Bingham said. "People who have worked hard to learn new skills and are about to use them in new fields of employment."

He spoke about a graduate with physical disabilities who could easily have retired on government benefits. Instead, she came to Vocational Rehabilitation to enhance her office skills and is now working as an administrative assistant.

Another graduate with multiple disabilities is working in information support following his ITTC training.

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SCEIS goes live

The S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department and 36 other state agencies took a major step toward reinventing how state government does business on Nov. 2.

The launch of the S.C. Enterprise Information System (SCEIS) "was the largest event in the administration of the state's finances in more than 30 years," said Pat O'Cain, director of the SCEIS project.

SCEIS is replacing labor intensive, paper-reliant systems and outdated computer networks with a consolidated system that will manage financial, procurement and human resources records for all state

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

DDS expediting claims from wounded soldiers

By **Gloria Robinson**

DDS Program Analyst

Disability Determination Services and the Social Security Administration have teamed up with the Family Assistance Center at Ft. Jackson to expedite applications for disability benefits from wounded Army soldiers.

Ft. Jackson is home to one of the 36 U.S. Army Warrior Transition Units that provide up to six months of assistance to approximately 100 wounded soldiers as they transition back into their military unit or into civilian life.

A DDS military liaison attends monthly briefings at the Family Assistance Center to explain the disability decision process and answer questions from soldiers who are interested in applying for benefits or who already have pending applications. In addition, the liaison answers frequent

questions about claim processing, claim status and related issues.

DDS gives priority to all claims received on military casualties, regardless of whether the soldier is assigned to the Warrior Transition Unit. The liaison also monitors pending military casualty claims to make sure they are processed as quickly as possible.

Disability examiners who process these “wounded warrior” cases receive special training on the effects of post-traumatic stress syndrome and traumatic brain injuries. Any military casualty case on which the examiner is unable to make a favorable decision is given a second review before being closed by DDS.

South Carolina DDS makes every effort to ensure that our wounded heroes are given the best possible service in the processing of their disability applications.

Graduation

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And a third, Bingham said, was able to take advantage of a unique program that partners with employers to provide company-specific training.

Today, she’s employed by a major telecommunications business, working from her home.

He also spoke about the resources provided by SCVRD that enable people with disabilities to reach their potential—the practical and technical knowledge shared by members of the Business Advisory Council; the assistive technology support; the occupational and

physical therapy.

“And, of course, the faculty that has been right there with you through the program,” he said.

Bingham said the program provides an “excellent return on the taxpayer investment. . . a great bottom line from a financial standpoint.

“But the real bottom line is what you realize in terms of making your life better, and what it means to your family. How you become part of the workforce and continue to work hard and build even more new opportunities for yourselves down the road.”

Fifty-nine students were in the graduating class.

Employers hear from peers about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities

“Profitability in Hiring People with Disabilities” was the theme for the October meeting of the S.C. Employer Council.

The Employer Council is a partnership of South Carolina employers and public and private sector organizations working to enhance the state’s workforce and economy. About 145 people attended the meeting.

Michael Doyle, vice president and general manager of Manpower’s Southeast Division, kicked off the proceedings with a presentation on “Employee Retention and Motivation.”

He was followed by Keith Scarbrough, manager of the Walgreens Distribution Center in Anderson.

Scarbrough said when the center opened two years ago, the goal was to have people with disabilities comprise 30 percent of its workforce. That number is up to 40 percent today and the concept has been so successful that a new distribution center in Connecticut is following the same formula.

Together, those two centers have the highest efficiency rate in the Walgreens system. By next year, Walgreens intends to have 1,000 people with disabilities working in its distribution centers.

Walgreens made a commitment at the outset to share what it has learned from the experience with other businesses interested in hiring people with disabilities. It is doing that by holding “boot camps” at the Anderson center.

Scarbrough showed a video about Lowe’s successful experience



Phoenix Hardin, left, of All South Federal Credit Union answers a question during the panel discussion. To the right of Hardin are Armand Lawrence of Pontiac Foods, and B.J. Graham-Love and Gayel Wigfall of Blue Cross and Blue Shield.

hiring people with disabilities.

A panel discussion explored the benefits of workers with disabilities from several perspectives.

Phoenix Hardin, a recruiter for All South Federal Credit Union, talked about hiring employees from the Skilled Workforce Apprenticeship Training (SWAT) program, an initiative of the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department.

She said the program is low-cost and low-risk. SCVRD pre-screens potential employees and reimburses part of the training cost.

The SWAT program “saves us \$2,000 per person,” she said.

Armand Lawrence is production manager for Pontiac Foods, which contracts with SCVRD’s Richland Work Training Center to assemble grocery store display units for Kroger.

Clients at the center put together about 50,000 units a year.

“It’s about a 30 percent savings for VR to do it,” Lawrence said.

“They manage the resources well and ship directly from the training center.”

B.J. Graham-Love, information services training manager for Blue Cross and Blue Shield, related her experience with hiring an entry-level programmer who is blind.

“Employees who are legally blind or deaf far exceed their peers” in performance, she said.

Asked about the workplace attitude toward people with disabilities, Gayel Wigfall, diversity consultant for Blue Cross, said there’s a period of uncertainty at first.

However, once workers without disabilities “get over the initial trepidation, they can look past the disability and realize [people with disabilities] are first of all just people with values, attitudes and needs like yours.

“Once that’s done, it’s nothing but a positive experience,” Wigfall said.

Disability employment awareness theme for open houses, mentoring experiences

S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation offices around the state took the opportunity to show off their facilities and raise awareness about employing people with disabilities during National Disability Employment Awareness Month in October.

Many of the offices combined Disability Mentoring Day events with their open houses.

Disability Mentoring Day is a nationwide effort to promote career development for high school students with disabilities through hands-on career exploration. Students with disabilities are matched with workplace mentors according to their career interests. The students experience a typical day on the job and employers gain an increased awareness that people with disabilities represent an overlooked talent pool.

Forty-four students and adults and more than 20 mentors participated in Disability Mentoring Day in **Greenwood** before joining about 200 open house guests for lunch. The staff received a note from a mother who said her son has not stopped talking about his experience at Greenwood Today, an online newspaper.

"He has always talked about being a sports writer and to have the opportunity to do it, even if it was only for a couple of hours, has really got him going," she said.



Patonya Mack, left, an instructor at the Kenneth Shuler School of Cosmetology in Columbia, demonstrates hair-washing technique for Latoya Glover of Dreher High School.

In **Charleston**, 12 clients and six mentors participated. The mentors included the Charleston County Legislative Delegation office thanks to Rep. David Mack III, who invited students to visit him in Columbia when the legislature reconvenes. A large group attended the open house and toured the training center.



Bob Steele, senior hydrologist for the LPA Group in Columbia, explains a topographic map to Thomas Tadlock of Swansea High School.

The **Berkeley-Dorchester** office partnered with the Berkeley Chamber of Commerce to host its annual Business Clinic. Thirty-three

vendors set up booths on the training center floor and about 75 community and chamber members attended, including S.C. Reps. Joe Daning and Joe Jefferson and Berkeley County Supervisor Dan Davis.

A local radio station did a live broadcast outside the work training center.

The **Laurens** office reports more than 90 people attended its open house, quite a few for the first time. In addition to tours of the training center, visitors were treated to an assistive technology demonstration by VR rehab engineer Jonathan Cruce.

Kay Chandler, director of disability services at Newberry College, spoke at the open house luncheon in **Newberry**, where students participating in Disability Mentoring Day and their mentors also were recognized.

More than 40 business partners and referral source representatives attended the **Marlboro** open house.

Efrem Andrews, regional human resource manager with Perdue Farms, spoke on his positive relationship with SCVRD. He praised VR's ability to adapt to Perdue's hiring practices and successfully screen job candidates, resulting in a much higher retention rate than that for candidates who come

from elsewhere.

A former client spoke about the benefits of the cardiac rehab

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Evan Smith, left, of Swansea High School, tries his hand at welding under the guidance of Chris Cook, a Midlands Technical College welding student.

program and Rep. Doug Jennings joined the group for lunch.

Hartsville welcomed more than 50 business partners and referral source representatives to its open house despite two high-profile competing events.

Guest speaker Mike Kromer, human resources director at Anderson Brass, brought examples of quality work done by VR clients and said the training center's transportation service was very valuable to his company.

A former client spoke about the benefits of the training center. He challenged clients to prepare for success, set goals and take advantage of opportunities. Sen. Gerald Malloy and Rep. Denny Nielson stopped by after attending other events.

Thirteen students and nine mentors participated in **Richland's** Disability Mentoring Day/Open House event, which also included a tour of the training center and lunch. Mildred Allen, project manager with SCANA, spoke.

A total of 23 students and six job seekers participated in Disability Mentoring Day events with 13 employers in **Rock Hill** and **Lancaster**.

Clients who shadowed at York County Road Maintenance made

street signs for themselves and their counselors. York Technical College Information Technology Department mentees took home computer hardware pieces and mentees in the Welding Department welded pieces of metal to take home. A client who shadowed at the Olive Garden restaurant was

encouraged to complete a job application.

In **Walterboro**, Bonnie Farnoli from the Colleton County Commission on Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse spoke about the benefits of partnerships.

A former client who had substance abuse problems but has been clean for almost two years told the audience they should never give up. Her daughter, who could not attend, sent a statement that said, "VR gave my mother her family back. . . Let her know that we love her and are proud of her."

Alease Samuels, who represents the area on the agency's board, also attended.

Six students and their mentors participated in Disability Mentoring Day in **Camden**.

The **Williamsburg** Work Training Center open house showcased growth over the past year with new contracts requiring higher skill levels.

Lisha Pasley, transition coordinator for the Williamsburg

County School District spoke about partnerships and her wish to strengthen and expand services. A client and his mentor, a former VR client, talked about their Disability Mentoring Day experience.

Florence welcomed more than 150 guests, including SCVRD board Chairman Derle Lowder Sr., who assisted with awards recognition. Rep. Terry Alexander spoke and recognized Sen. Kent Williams and other state legislators and local leaders.

Long-standing business partner and Florence City Councilman Steve Powers was guest speaker. A client talked about her Disability Mentoring Day experience and a former client talked about the opportunity to show her abilities to employers.

More than 55 guests attended the **Beaufort** open house, including local government officials, former clients and industry representatives.

Dan Peters of Greenville Industries spoke about his initial reservations about working with VR and what a positive experience it turned out to be.

These and local mayors' committee NDEA Month activities drew significant media coverage about the potential of people with disabilities in the workplace.



Rich O'Dell, left, station manager for WLTX in Columbia, discusses TV production with Justin Biggom of Lower Richland High School.

DDS employees win regional recognition

Five S.C. Disability Determination Services employees have received PRIDE awards from the Social Security Administration's Atlanta Region.

Sylvester Jackson, professional/medical relations officer in Greenville, was named Staff Person of the Year. His work in recruiting seven freestanding diagnostic clinics for the consultative examination (CE) provider panel in the past 12 months has saved the agency tremendous CE costs. Through his efforts, the Greenville office received 55 percent of its medical records and almost 87 percent of its CE reports electronically.



Jackson

He is parliamentarian for the S.C. Association of Disability Examiners (SCADES), an SCVRA division, and is very involved in a number of agency organizations and workgroups. He also is pastor of a local church with 140 members, a Christian academy and a nursery.

Dr. Donna Rook Stroud, senior physician in Greenville,



Stroud

received the Mary Simmons Special Act of Service Award.

A pediatric medical consultant, she carried through on extraordinary efforts to make a favorable decision for a 1-year-old claimant with deafness whose parents are both deaf and mute.

Dr. Stroud led the effort to recall a claim that was previously denied and even assisted in arranging medical care for the child.

Lisa Smith-Klohn, Ph.D., a psychologist in Columbia, received the Medical Consultant of the Year Award. Dr. Smith-Klohn demonstrates outstanding achievement in performance, professionalism and service.



Smith-Klohn

She takes on complex cases and maintains a 100 percent accuracy rate. She volunteers for office projects and social functions and serves as a liaison between the medical community and DDS.

Her commitment to quality, customer service and teamwork are well respected at Columbia DDS and across the state.

Edward D. Waller, Ph.D., also a psychologist in Columbia, received the Robert R. Hinrichs DDS Humanitarian Award. The award honors DDS employees who have dedicated their lives to helping others.

He contributes positively to the morale of the Columbia DDS office, helping the staff tap into the most charitable parts of themselves.

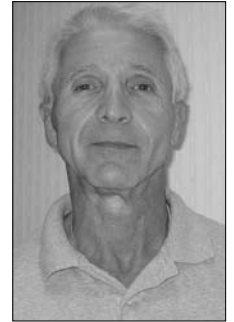
He organizes participation in the Adopt-A-Family program, is active on the DDS Social Committee and assists with events such as Employee Recognition luncheons and the annual Halloween costume contest.

He dedicates a significant amount of his own time to charitable causes.

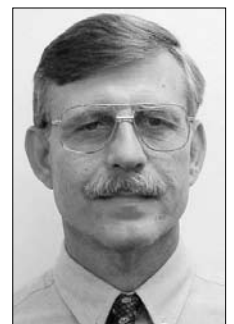
Terry Horton, regional office trainer in Charleston, received the Thomas M. Leahy Creative Achievement Award.

Horton developed a training plan to address deficiencies in the level of adjudicative knowledge that would not require complete retraining of the examiner staff.

The program has been implemented in Charleston on the production team level and the examiner staff anticipates increased accuracy in a shorter period of time.



Waller



Horton



Representatives from Procurement, Finance, Budgets, Information Technology, Client Services, Training Center Services and Disability Determination Services gather in the “war room” to answer questions from the field about the SCEIS system.

SCEIS

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agencies centrally. The system is being implemented to provide faster processing, more affordable resources and better information for decision-making.

“As with any new system that brings changes as sweeping as these, we are hitting some bumps (and an occasional sinkhole!) in the

road,” said SCVRD Commissioner Barbara Hollis.

“But I want to let you know how pleased I am with our agency’s response to this challenge,” she told the staff. “You have done everything that we have asked, and more, to make this conversion work.”

A conference room in the State Office was converted into a “war room” so issues could be addressed as they arise. Representatives from

Procurement, Finance, Budgets, Information Technology, Client Services, Training Center Services and DDS have put in untold hours preparing for the conversion. They are available to answer questions from the field and expedite solutions.

“They have sacrificed time with their families during this period and have worked long hours under stressful conditions,” Hollis said. “And they have done so with such an amazing spirit and fierce determination.”

She said problems are being addressed with SCEIS and “we are making progress.

“In the long run, our agency and our clients and claimants will absolutely benefit. We have already seen glimmers of the advantages and efficiency of this system.”

In March, the agency will begin using the human resources and payroll components of SCEIS. This conversion will include MySCEmployee, an online system that will allow each employee to view their pay stub anywhere and manage work functions such as making leave requests and submitting travel expenses.



SCEIS consultant Cheryl Clements, right, and Denise Koon, client services specialist, research an answer.

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The South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department reports that it printed 5,200 copies of this newsletter at a cost of \$1188, or about \$.23 a copy.

Journalism Contest entry deadline Jan. 19

The 2010 Journalism Contest is accepting entries until Jan. 19, 2010.

The theme for the contest, sponsored by the S.C. Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, is "Expectation + opportunity = full participation."

It is open to South Carolinians 16 to 19 years old who have not entered a post-secondary school before March 1, 2010. Entrants must be a high school junior or senior or otherwise qualified to begin post-secondary education no later than the 2011–2012 school year.

They do not have to have a disability to enter.

The winner receives a four-year scholarship to the South Carolina state-supported institution of their choice, provided they are otherwise qualified. The scholarship pays for undergraduate tuition and fees, which may or may not include room and board.

It may be canceled if the recipient does not maintain general scholastic and conduct standards established by the institution.

Entries must be postmarked no later than Jan. 19, 2010.

More information is available at journalism.scvrd.net or by calling the SCVRD Public Information Office at (803) 896-6833.



Brooke Adams of Fort Mill was the 2009 Journalism Contest winner. She is attending Clemson University.