

HORIZONS

SOUTH CAROLINA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION DEPARTMENT

Successes, challenges mark ADA's 20 years

As Americans marked the 20th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act on July 26, SCVRD board Chairman Derle A. Lowder Sr. said the act was a turning point for people with disabilities.

'Disability is the only minority group any one of us can join at any time. If you don't think so, just keep on living.'

—LaMondre Pough

Lowder has used a wheelchair since he fell from a grain silo in 1957.

"I spent 30 years in a wheelchair before the ADA was signed and the last 20 have been a whole lot better," Lowder said. "Accessibility for people with disabilities has improved ten-fold since then."

In Columbia, the Mayor's

Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities celebrated the anniversary with a ceremony on the State House grounds.

Kathy Martin, an attorney with Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities Inc., said, "The presence or absence of a disability does not predict the quality of life."

"The ADA supports the rights of all people," said LaMondre Pough, an SCVRD client who owns his own consulting firm.

"July 26, 1990, was Independence Day for equality, independence and freedom" for people with disabilities, he said.

Pough, who has quadriplegia, said 54 million Americans have



LaMondre Pough speaks at the ADA ceremony in Columbia.

a disability—"that's one in three households. People with disabilities control \$220 billion in discretionary income," he said. "We are mainstream America."

See ADA, page 7

INSIDE

Hewitt finds new niche, new challenges..... 3
Bryant Center an SCVRD milestone 4
Bryant Center initiates distance learning 5
DDS staffers win regional, state awards 6
Investigative unit reaps millions in savings..... 7
Legislative breakfast..... 8

Businesses, individuals receive Governor's Committee honors

The Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities honored four businesses and two individuals May 7 at its 2010 Awards Luncheon in Columbia.

The businesses were honored for their willingness to hire people with disabilities.

Level One of Greer and Fujifilm of Greenwood tied for Large Employer of the Year, presented to an employer with more than 250 employees.

Level One is a leasing solution company that represents apartment complexes nationwide and arranges

See Committee, page 2

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Committee

continued from page 1

on-site visits to properties.

Last year, it partnered with the S.C. Commission for the Blind to provide training for home call agents who simulate calls on various scenarios to enhance the customer service skills of Level One trainees. Level One has hired seven home call agents with visual impairments or blindness during the past year and provided adaptive software for them.

Fujifilm's Greenwood facility has five high-technology plants producing ink-jet photo paper, digital and conventional printing plates, recyclable cameras and color photographic paper. It is the largest Fujifilm distribution center in the world.

The company has embraced SCVRD's SWAT (Skilled Workforce Apprenticeship Training) Program, which prepares VR clients for career opportunities in skilled positions.

Fujifilm has employed people with disabilities as digital imaging technicians and processors, customer service representatives, photograph croppers, assemblers and warehouse associates.

AMC Management Co. of Duncan is the 2010 Medium Employer of the Year, presented to an employer with between 26 and 250 employees.

AMC has franchises for three McDonald's restaurants, two in Duncan and one in Inman. It works with SCVRD to hire managerial candidates through the SWAT program. About 20 people with disabilities work at the restaurants in part-time, entry level and managerial capacities.

Quality Foods of Anderson is the 2010 Small Employer of the Year, presented to an employer with 25 or fewer employees.

The company works with

SCVRD and the Anderson Disabilities and Special Needs Board to provide job shadowing and employment opportunities to people with disabilities. With a staff of seven, it has hired two people with disabilities in the past year.

Taylor Addison, a spring graduate of Bishop England High School in Charleston, is the winner of the 2010 Journalism Contest sponsored by the committee. He received a four-year scholarship to the state-supported institution of his choice and is attending The Citadel this fall.



Addison

Addison wrote the winning essay on the theme "Expectation + opportunity = full participation." He highlighted the cases of four people with disabilities and related how their positive attitudes and adaptive abilities made them valuable employees in careers such as sales manager, information technology, television anchorwoman and electrician.

Lester Porter of Springfield is the winner of the 2010 Employment Achievement Award, presented to an individual who has met the challenges of a significant disability and succeeded in the workplace and the community.

After receiving his high school attendance certificate, Porter came to the day program offered by the Orangeburg County Disabilities and Special Needs Board. He was hired as a grocery bagger and his love of people and willingness to work hard have endeared him to customers and staff alike.



Porter

Hewitt finds new niche, new challenges

Michael Hewitt describes himself as a “glass half-full” kind of guy.

So when he began to have issues with his back and had to leave his job at the Honda plant in Timmonsville, he was ready to explore other employment options.

The Honda plant manufactures all-terrain vehicles and personal watercraft. Hewitt worked in engineering support but could no longer do his job making sure the machines worked properly.

The folks at Honda referred him to SCVRD’s Florence office. Tameka Brockington, his counselor, said Hewitt initially wanted to go Florence-Darlington Technical College for training in AutoCAD, a computer drafting and design software.

“From day one, he was eager to go back to work,” she said. “He just needed a little guidance and assistance.”

Brockington told him about SCVRD’s Information Technology Training Center and referred him to the Evaluation Center in West Columbia for a full evaluation.

He enrolled in the Pain Management Program and utilized the pool at the Muscular Development Center as therapy for his back.

He qualified for the Information Technology Training Center and started the 11-month course to become an AutoCAD technician.

“He’s an extremely intelligent man—you could tell how much he loved to work,” said former ITTC supervisor Jim Williams. “He’d earned all sorts of certifications at Honda. He wants to improve so he can offer more to the employer. That’s the attitude you want in an employee.”

The AutoCAD training “was

totally different from what I had done,” Hewitt said, “but the knowledge (of mechanics) I had overlapped.”

“There are some really good instructors at VR,” said Hewitt, 47. “This (AutoCAD) knowledge has opened a lot more doors; led to a lot more opportunities.”

Williams said Hewitt “quickly took off learning” and soon earned a reputation for pushing the envelope. He was one of the few candidates to pass the national AutoCAD certification test on the first try.

In June 2009, a Pawleys Island company that serves the metal

casting, recycling/recovery and manufacturing industries, was looking for an AutoCAD detailer to draw plans for recycling equipment.

“We found out about the VR [ITTC] program and it was of great interest to us,” said Paul Hanna, president of MetalTech Systems.

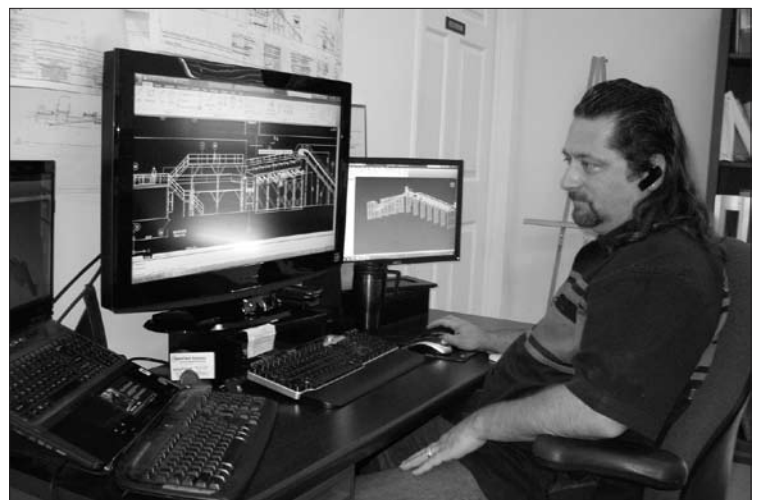
Hanna said the company had made a commitment to “give back as much as we could. The VR program was of interest because we could integrate it with what we do here.”

Rob Amrine, SCVRD business development specialist serving the Conway, Georgetown and Williamsburg areas, talked with MetalTech co-owner Richard Howard about the opening and

then consulted with Williams.

Williams recommended two clients for interviews and Hewitt was selected to participate in a SWAT (Skilled Workforce Apprenticeship Training) opportunity at MetalTech.

Clients participating in the SWAT program learn on the job to the employers’ specifications while SCVRD pays a portion of the



Michael Hewitt designing a recycling system.

training costs.

Hewitt started on-the-job training at MetalTech in August 2009, and immediately put his mechanical and AutoCAD skills to work.

After a work-site evaluation, Rehabilitation Technology bought and modified a desk and provided a monitor riser and an ergonomic arm rest for Hewitt.

He was hired in October.

“We couldn’t be more pleased,” Hanna said. “Michael has a good background and he understands what’s necessary for building things.

“Now he’s anxious to get out in the field and get his hands on things.”

See *Hewitt*, page 5

Bryant Center an SCVRD milestone

The South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department reached a milestone in its history with the June 11 dedication and open house at the Bryant Center in Lyman.

Nearly 12 years from concept to completion, the center represents expanded VR services for people with disabilities in the Upstate.

Named for former Commissioner Larry C. Bryant, who shepherded the center through its construction, it houses a Comprehensive Services Unit in addition to an area office.

The comprehensive services include physical and occupational therapy, a brain injury program, a pain management program, rehabilitation engineering and information technology training facilities previously available only on the main SCVRD campus in West Columbia.

The department has vocational rehabilitation centers in Greenville and Spartanburg, but there was no

room for expansion at either facility. The Comprehensive Services Unit serves people with significant physical disabilities in nine Upstate counties while the area office serves the Lyman area.

Bryant said the center reflects SCVRD's core mission of enabling people with disabilities to prepare for, achieve and maintain competitive employment.

"We're trying to make all of our services accessible to our clients who need them the most," he said. "It's usually harder for them to travel to Columbia because of their disabilities."

Bryant, who attended the dedication with his family, was joined by members of the agency board; Rep. Rita Allison, R-Spartanburg, who was instrumental in securing state funding for the project; Sen. Lee Bright, R-Spartanburg; and other invited guests.

The open house provided an opportunity for eager members of the community to get a look at the contemporary facility, which is situated between Groce Road and the Middle Tyger River, near Byrnes High School and

other human service agencies in the area.

The unemployment rate for people with disabilities is substantially higher than it is for the general population. The Upstate was chosen for the Bryant Center because of the number of industries and job opportunities in the area and its closer proximity for clients who need comprehensive services.



Former Commissioner Larry Bryant poses with his wife Dr. Lisa Bryant in front of the portrait that hangs in the lobby of the Bryant Center. The inscription on the plaque below the picture reads: "This facility is dedicated to Larry C. Bryant, SCVRD commissioner from 2002 until 2008, whose visionary leadership and passion for expanding service-delivery options for people with disabilities resulted in the establishment of this center and these specialized programs for the citizens of Upstate South Carolina."



Physical therapy assistant Ward Gray works with a client

Bryant Center initiates distance learning

With the opening of the Bryant Center, SCVRD moves into a new era that revolutionizes the delivery of information technology training and could make a significant impact on how other agency services are provided.

The first information technology training class began at the center in June with a seven-month course in Business Applications Plus. It is VR's first venture into distance learning using a wireless teleconferencing system coupled with online course content.

Teachers at the Information Technology Training Center in West Columbia provide direct instruction to students at the Bryant Center in Lyman using the teleconferencing system. They can broadcast any learning materials and talk live with the students, said Jim Williams, former ITTC supervisor.

The online course content has two parts, he said. First is a virtual training campus, where students can view their assignments and upload their work.

The second part involves EditU.org, an online campus for people with disabilities and the people who serve them. It features assistive technology such as screen readers, shortcut keys for all mouse actions, alternative images to replace



Agency board members, guests and staff members tour the Information Technology distance learning classroom during the June 11 dedication.

animated graphics and it eliminates some screen refresh rates that could cause seizures in some individuals.

"The students have enjoyed [the distance learning experience] very much," Williams said. "They talk to the students here [in West Columbia] and collaborate with them."

The advantage of the virtual technology is that it can go anywhere and the teleconferencing capability provides soft-skills instruction.

But the biggest benefit, Williams said, is that instruction can be tailored to meet a client's needs.

For instance, clients can learn

computer literacy. Many clients can use email, Twitter and Facebook, but some don't know how to really use a computer.

"It's like knowing how to work the air-conditioning and the stereo in a car, but not knowing how to drive," he said.

On the other hand, some clients with paraprofessional or professional backgrounds just need to upgrade their skills.

"This represents a significant opportunity to directly meet the needs of the client in the way the client wants his or her needs met," Williams said.

Hewitt

continued from page 3

Hanna said that prior to hiring Hewitt, he had not had any experience working with a person with a disability, but he doesn't have any reservations after meeting Hewitt.

"If they're comfortable, it certainly

works for us," Hanna said of people with disabilities.

"I would strongly urge other companies to consider hiring VR clients.

"We're very pleased with the program. We'll continue to participate as we see our needs grow," he said.

A second VR client recently started an apprenticeship at

MetalTech.

Although he makes the 150-mile round trip from his home in Florence to Pawleys Island every day, Hewitt and MetalTech seem to be a solid fit.

"If you enjoy your job, it's not so much work," Hewitt said. "You look at it like 'what new challenges can I work with today?'"

DDS staffers win regional, state awards

Nine South Carolina Disability Determination Services staffers were recognized at the regional level during ceremonies in Atlanta in July and 13 more were honored at the state PRIDE celebration May 12.



Vlahos

Susan Vlahos from the Greenville DDS office received the Regional Commissioner's Citation in recognition of her superior commitment, creativity and performance in elevating the quality and effectiveness of the regional office and state DDS training program.

The Columbia DDS Central Control Team won a regional award for exceptional customer service. Team members are Cynthia Ellis, team leader; Cyndi Crolley, Jane Davey, Diedre Fulmer, Sherron

Mathis, Luanne Moore, Courtney Simmons and Gina Trucks.

State PRIDE celebration winners were: Allen Cooper, Greenville, Examiner of the Year; Gary Calhoun, Greenville, Medical Consultant of the Year; Jane Davey, Columbia, Mary Simmons Special Act of Service; Joyce Broadus-Lewis, Columbia, Staff Supervisor of the Year; Marion Watson, Columbia, Staff Person of the Year; Megan Ward, Charleston, Rookie Examiner of the Year; Bridgett Mitchell, HHS Program, Lexington Office of State Claims Excellence Award; Terry White, Charleston, Case Processing Supervisor of the Year; Wanda Scott, Greenville, Carl Fullbright Humanitarian Award; William Heidkamp, Charleston, Support Person of the Year.

Also, Lisa Klohn, Edward Waller and Manhal Wieland, all of Columbia, received the Thomas M. Leahy Creative Achievement Award.



Broadus-Lewis



Calhoun



Cooper



Davey



Heidkamp



Klohn



Among the members of the DDS Central Control Team are, from left, Cynthia Ellis, Deidre Fulmer, Luanne Moore, Courtney Simmons, Gina Trucks and Cyndi Crolley. Jane Davey and Sherron Mathis are pictured separately.



Mathis



Mitchell



Ward



Watson



White



Wieland



Scott



Waller

Investigative unit reaps millions in savings

People who take unfair advantage of the Social Security Administration's benefits program in South Carolina are finding out the hard way that it's the wrong thing to do.

Since the Cooperative Disability Investigations (CDI) unit was established seven months ago, 69 investigations have been opened and 47 have been closed. Those investigations have generated more than \$4 million in Social Security benefits savings and more than \$2.1 million in Medicare/Medicaid savings, said Shirley Jarrett, assistant director of the Disability Determination Services program.

"Investigations are conducted

47 investigations = savings of \$6.1 million in taxes

on all levels of claims (initial and appeals), as well as those already receiving benefit payments," Jarrett said.

"Most of the approved applicants have legitimate disabilities; however, if there is an allegation of an individual who either misrepresented their symptoms or continued to perform substantial gainful employment while hiding their earnings, this unit can conduct an investigation to determine the validity of such allegations."

The CDI unit investigated one recipient who had been receiving benefits since 1999.

The recipient had been working the whole time in addition to providing false medical information during the review process, Jarrett said.

When the case was tried in U.S. District Court, the recipient was sentenced to 30 months in federal prison and ordered to pay \$600,000 in restitution. Savings to the Social Security Administration were approximately \$400,000.

"DDS is excited to have a Cooperative Disability Investigation unit in our state," Jarrett said.

"The work this unit does results in good stewardship of the SSA, SSI, Medicare and Medicaid funds. It also provides valuable documentation to DDS and SSA to ensure that the correct decisions are being made on disability claims."

The CDI unit combines the skills of the U.S. Office of Inspector General (OIG), Disability Determination Services, Social Security field offices and numerous state and local law enforcement agencies.

The unit consists of a team leader from OIG, two agents from the State Law Enforcement Division (SLED), two Social Security field office representatives and one disability determination analyst. Most of the investigation referrals come from the DDS offices.

ADA

continued from page 1

And, he reminded the gathering, "disability is the only minority group any one of us can join at any time. If you don't think so, just keep on living."

An online survey of disability leaders found that the act has fulfilled much of its promise since it went into effect, but the findings also uncover new challenges.

The ADA was intended to provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities.

Lex Frieden, a professor at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, authored the non-scientific survey of 870 participants. Frieden, who helped craft the ADA, has used a wheelchair since his

spinal cord was severed in a 1967 traffic accident.

"Overall, more than 90 percent of survey respondents believe that the quality of life for people with disabilities in communities across the United States has improved greatly since the passage of the ADA," Frieden said.

"But respondents also pointed out that there are opportunities to be realized and challenges to overcome."

He said the survey underscores the need for aggressive action to address health-care gaps and unemployment among people with disabilities.

He emphasized the need to provide housing and personal assistance services for the approximately 79 million baby boomers who will face increasing risk of disability as they age.

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8



Sens. Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, center, and Billy O'Dell, R-Abbeville, right, chat with a colleague.



Rep. Gene Pinson, R-Greenwood, left, with Houston Matthews, Greenwood area supervisor.



Felicia Johnson, Richland area supervisor, with Rep. Leon Howard, D-Richland.



Ivory Canty, left, Orangeburg area supervisor, with Rep. Lester Branham, D-Florence, and Rep. Gilda Cobb-Hunter, D-Orangeburg.

Legislative Breakfast
The S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Association held its annual Legislative Breakfast May 6. The event provided an opportunity to thank legislators for their support and to answer questions about VR services and needs.



Agency board member Dr. Roxzanne Breland with Rep. David Umphlett, R-Berkeley.