



Business matters

Encouraging Diversity in the Workplace • Promoting a Positive Environment for Business Growth

Summer 2009

From the Commissioner's Desk



At DRS, we are keenly aware of our responsibility to help our clients become successfully employed and, through funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), we are now working to create more job opportunities for our clients in community-based settings. In a recent release issued by Governor Kaine, a total of \$500,000 in Economic Development Grants was awarded by DRS to stimulate 12 local economies and put 200 job seekers with disabilities into the Commonwealth's workforce.

"People with disabilities have always faced a high unemployment rate compared to those without disabilities, but this economic downturn has created an even larger gap as people with disabilities struggle to compete in this tight labor market," Governor Kaine stated in the release. "All Virginians deserve the opportunity for a better life through a better job, and I am pleased this recovery funding will create more than 200 jobs for Virginians with disabilities."

In another release taken from an event at Rappahannock Goodwill Industries (RGI), Governor Kaine went on to say that, at the statewide level, stimulus money has already been utilized to start training 1,000 Virginians with disabilities to enter the work force – about half of them should be employed within the year.

"When resources are tough, and the economy is tough, we really need to get creative," Governor Kaine said.

Rappahannock Goodwill Industries is just one of the many Employment Services Organizations (ESOs) that DRS partners with to provide employment and vocational training to individuals with disabilities. Additionally, ESOs supply competitive services and products to public and private industry. The statewide program has been responsible for increased revenue for numerous employment providers and for expanded job opportunities for thousands of individuals with disabilities.

As Commissioner of DRS, I am always amazed at the entrepreneurial spirit exhibited by our ESO partners. Some of RGI's clients include: George Washington University Hospital; Howard University Hospital; FBI Academy; Air Force One and Two; Quantico Marine Corps Base; Pentagon Force Police; and the National Institutes of Health.

This recent round of projects funded with \$500,000 ARRA funds will support business enterprises in ventures such as: document scanning and shredding, janitorial contracts in the community, donut sales and marketing, laundry, mobile car washes, and health care.

We value our partnership with the ESOs as it has enabled our agency to help individuals with more significant disabilities find jobs that match their skills and abilities. The funds will be a great aid in our ability to effectively respond to our clients' specific needs.

Best,
-Jim Rothrock

Official Theme for 2009 October National Disability Employment Awareness Month Announced

In a June news release issued by the U.S. Department of Labor, the 2009 theme for October's National Disability Employment Awareness Month is "Expectation + Opportunity = Full Participation."

This year's theme is intended to urge employers, as they seek to fill positions, to embrace the richness of America's diversity by considering the talents of all workers, including workers with disabilities, the release stated.

In Virginia, the Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) will be commemorating Disability Employment Awareness Month by once again holding a series of events and activities designed to recognize and honor disability "champion" employers, as well as champion employees with disabilities.

To kick-off Disability Employment Awareness Month in the Commonwealth, DRS and Dominion will be co-hosting the Fourth Annual Disability Employment Champions Awards Luncheon on October 2, 2009 in Richmond, Virginia. Stay tuned for more details about the 2009 Champions Awards Luncheon and other local events planned in your area!



Interested in hosting a local event or activity to celebrate Disability Employment Awareness Month at your company?

Here are a few suggestions to consider:

- **Become a Disability Mentor to a youth(s) with a disability.**
Disability Mentoring Day (DMD), is a national program that promotes career development for students and job-seekers with disabilities through job shadowing and hands-on career exploration. For more information, visit, www.dmd-aapd.org.
- **Provide a disability sensitivity awareness training at your business.**
Contact DRS for assistance with sensitivity awareness training.
- **Hold a disability resource fair.**
Invite vendors to showcase assistive technology devices, services, and other community resources.
- **Join with DRS to co-sponsor an event.**
Partner with DRS and show your commitment to disability employment.

As a Matter of Fact:

According to the June 2009 reports from the U.S. Department of Labor, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities reached 14.3 percent – the highest rate of unemployment since the government began tracking monthly disability employment data. (This number is compared to the 9.5 percent for persons without a disability.)

Local business recognized for employing disabled

Local business, Homemade by Suzanne, in Ashland, Virginia, receives recognition for employing persons with disabilities. Employees Brandon Sisson and Shannon Buracker (former DRS clients), were featured in an article that appeared in the July 14, 2009 issue of the Richmond-Times Dispatch.

To read the full article go to:

www2.timesdispatch.com/rtd/business/local/article/B-HOME14_20090713-204203/279763/

To learn more about Homeade by Suzanne visit their site: www.homemadesbysuzanne.com/



Photo taken by Lindy Keast Rodman, Richmond Times-Dispatch

Brandon Sisson at Homemade by Suzanne in Ashland, where he has worked seven years.

Innovative Thinkers, Innovative Solutions

Did you know that many of today's hottest technologies were first developed for people with disabilities? Take text messaging. Long used by the deaf community, it's an increasingly popular communication tool for everyone. Similarly, the technology used to improve wheelchairs now powers people on Segways' up and down city streets. Read more about the "Expanding Innovative Thinkers, Innovative Solutions" in the June issue of Business Sense at www.dol.gov/odep/bsense/bsense0609.htm.

Innovation allows companies to create more efficient and effective business processes; develop and implement management strategies to attract and retain qualified talent; and use technology in new ways to increase productivity. Businesses including CVS, Walgreens, and Dow Chemical share their stories in this brief video: www.earnworks.com/BusinessCase/videos/Innovation.html.



Walgreens Senior VP Randy Lewis talks about Innovative Solutions