

# GVRA



April 2014

## JOINT CHIEFS AT RIMS

Georgia's Economic Recovery & Growth MUST include Employment for Citizens with Disabilities – GVRA is good for business.

A collaboration including staff members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff met at Roosevelt Warm Springs.

for citizens—and specifically veterans—with disabilities.

The meeting and tour followed the recent impending lease of the golf course on the site to the Wounded Warrior Alliance (WWA).

In addition, the agreement will provide sustainable golfing opportunities for residents surrounding the Merriwether County area.

The project will include a partnership that will restore the golf course, improve the grounds and provide training and placement opportunities

GVRA thanks the Georgia General Assembly and Governor Deal for making this partnership happen a reality.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Greg's Greetings
- Pictures From Joint Chiefs Visit
- IAWP Detergent Fundraiser
- Board Meeting Happenings
- BEP Activities
- DAS Career Fair
- Certified Mediator
- Transfer of RWS Hospitals
- Autism Awareness Month





# Greg's Greetings

## "Being a Partner"

In the sport of Cricket, two batsmen always bat in partnership, although only one is on strike at any time. This batsmen partnership allows more runs to be added to the scoreboard.

Just like in Cricket, there are benefits to a partnership, which is defined as an arrangement in which parties agree to cooperate to advance their mutual interests. Nowadays, we all hear about "strategic partnerships" and coops and alliances, but they are all intended to increase the number of runs on the scoreboard.

I believe the same is true with GVRA – that partnerships, at least the right partnerships, make good sense.

Partnerships do present challenges though that must be navigated (I can't resist using Navy terms). Overarching goals, levels of give-and-take, areas of responsibility and lines of authority all come into play in a true partnership. But if these and other challenges can be resolved, then the benefits of the partnership can outweigh the risks and

disadvantages. To me, it's almost the old adage of "two heads are better than one." I want our agency to be viewed as a good partner, a partner who brings added value and a partner who is dependable and trustworthy.

Here are some partnerships as I see them: the relationship between a counselor and a client, the relationship between the agency and its divisions, the relationship between this agency and another agency or the relationship between GVRA and the taxpayers of Georgia. And I am sure that there are others.

So please understand that as we continue to move forward and grow as an agency and individual divisions, partnerships will be part of our focus.

The more runs that I want to put on the scoreboard are the numbers of people we all serve and the number of successful outcomes. Together, we can make this a reality.

Thank you.

**Think** BIG. **Serve** MORE.  
**Do** BETTER.  
GVRA

# Joint Chiefs at RWS Pictures



## Save the Date

The next meeting of the GVRA board is on May 14 at 1 p.m. It will be at Jacobs Ladder Neurodevelopmental School and Therapy Center in Roswell.



The International Association of Workforce Professionals is hosting an ongoing fundraiser through the end of this year. Proceeds from the fundraiser will go to help the homeless.

For only \$25 you can get 3.5 gallons of liquid or powder laundry detergent. You can choose between either Gain or Tide. It is a presale, and the IAWP needs the money prior to delivery.

For more information, please contact Debra Barnes-Homer or Jonelle Samuel on the 6th floor of 2 Peachtree Street.

# New Hires and Retirements

The following hires are new to GVRA. Please welcome Barbara Estes Benchwick (RWS Allocation), Petrice Brown (VR College Park), Juanita Butler (VR Atlanta), Nermin Ghali (VR College Park), Shaun Houston (GVRA HR), Megan Hunt (RWS Information), Donald May (RWS Admin), Melissa McInvale (RWS Information), Melvin Russell (GVRA HR) and Kermisha Stringer (VR Atlanta).

Happy trails to Madeline Barone (DAS), Brenda Gaither (DAS South Units), Donald Hartley (VR Assistive Work Tech), Cecilia Jackson (DAS North Units), Earline Kinsey (DAS North Units) and Tonya Wright (GIB Brainbridge).

If you see any of the new folks, make sure to make them feel welcome.

# Board Meeting Happenings



Top: DAS Director Awilda Danko receives an award from GVRA Executive Director Greg Schmiege.



Bottom: Former Board Member Greg Kird recently retired to run for the Georgia Senate.

At the most recent meeting of the GVRA Board, Disability Adjudication Services Director Awilda Danko was presented with the Commissioner's Citation, the highest award from the Social Security Administration. The award noted that Awilda had done a tremendous job processing claims in Georgia.

Board Chairman Jimmy Defoor presented a plaque to Greg Kirk in recognition of his exemplary service to GVRA. Greg stepped down from his board post to run for the District 13 spot in the Georgia Senate.

## A Few Things



Business Enterprise Program  
A DIVISION OF THE GEORGIA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCY

On March 25, the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) conducted a Re-Grand Opening for licensed blind vendor manager, Jeffrey Doyle. Jeffrey operates a snack bar on the second floor of the old Rich's building located at 100 Alabama Street in downtown Atlanta.

For years, Jeffrey was barely making ends meet. Once new BEP Counselor Charlie Garrett began monitoring his shop though, things really changed. Not only was Jeffrey able to gain support from the building grantor to assist in marketing the location, he was also able to meet the requests from patrons of the gym located inside the Richs building by serving healthier lunch and breakfast options, which grew his customer base.

Since the establishment of new and healthier products, sales have tripled for Jeffrey. Congratulations Jeffrey and kudos to Charlie!

Also in the news at BEP, Jonathan Pichardo received his official blind vendor manager

license. This came after he successfully completed his 6-month probationary period. Jonathan operates and manages the I-95 South Interstate Rest Area Vending Machines located in Brunswick.

Jonathan is supervised by BEP Counselor, Drew Greenwell. Congratulations Jonathan!



BEP Blind Vendor Jonathan Pichardo with BEP Counselor Drew Greenwell. Jonathan recently was presented with his official vendor license.

# DAS Regional Anti-Fraud Award

# DAS

Disability Adjudication Services  
A DIVISION OF THE GEORGIA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCY

## April Employee

Dr. Virginia Bell-Pringle received this Quarter's DDS Anti-Fraud Award in the Social Security Administration's Atlanta Region. Pictured from left to right: Tammy Hernandez, CDI Unit Supervisor; Awilda Danko, DAS Director; Dr. Bell-Pringle; and, Rita McWhorter, DAS Legal Officer.



Hope Pounds is to be commended for her efforts during the recent procedure changes that occurred with the Medical Consultants/Psychological Consultants (MC/PC) payroll process. Hope was called upon initially to create requisitions for MC/PC payroll. However, it was quickly discovered that the Budget Unit staff did not have the required PeopleSoft financials access to source and dispatch the purchase orders. To ensure that the MC/PC payroll was not delayed, Ms. Pounds sourced and dispatched the purchase orders. She was the consummate professional throughout this process, accepting the challenge and ensuring that the job was done in a very timely and accurate manner.

For this reason and more, Hope is the DAS employee of the month for April 2014.

# 2.1 Billion Dollars

That's how much fully funding GVRA would contribute to the Georgia economy.

That's a big impact on the Georgia economy. Not only does it account for an increase in tax revenues associated with greater statewide employment, but it also accounts for the decline in state entitlement spending associated with a larger working population.

That's big. And it's very much possible. Please share this with as many folks as possible. It's important for Georgians to realize how much the mission of GVRA can impact the state economy as a whole.

# DAS Job Fair a Great Success

Hundreds of Georgians flocked to the recent DAS career fair, and many of the 92 open Positions were filled that day.

"It was great to see so many qualified candidates come out," said Marya Calhoun, GVRA HR Director. "We're always looking to bring the best and the brightest into the GVRA family."

While many of the positions were filled, some still remain open. If you or someone you know would like to apply for one of these positions, please visit the GVRA website at [www.gvra.ga.gov](http://www.gvra.ga.gov).

To the right are pictures from the recent career fair.



## Melanie Crew Certified as Mediator



GVRA staffer Melanie Crew poses with others who were recently certified as a mediator with the Justice Center of Atlanta.

GVRA Personnel Analyst Melanie Crew was recently certified as a mediator by the Justice Center of Atlanta.

The State of Georgia is one of a very few states in which individuals completing the prescribed course work can make application for registration as a mediator. The Justice Center of Atlanta is an approved training provider for this registration training and has been since the inception of the Georgia Commission on Dispute Resolution's training requirements in 1994.

Congratulations Melanie! If you see her, make sure she knows how proud we are.



GEORGIA INDUSTRIES FOR THE BLIND

# Food, Fun and Camaraderie at GIB

Sometimes, having a special occasion, event or holiday is not necessary to come together for a little camaraderie and a lot of delicious food.

On Wednesday March 26, the employees of Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB) were treated to a free meal of excellent grilled hotdogs with all the fixings during their lunch period. The free hotdog Cookout was sponsored by the Bainbridge Employee Event's Committee which holds fund raisers throughout the year to

support such events.

"There is really no special occasion; we just wanted to do something for our employees" said Mike Jackson, Bainbridge Plant manager.

GIB, which is one of the five programs under the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA), currently operates 3 manufacturing plants and 1 service site with over 100 highly skilled blind employees.



## New Timekeeping System

GVRA employees should be aware of an upcoming change to the way they log their work time.

sessions, as they will learn how to approve submitted time.

The weeks for training are tentatively the week of May 6 and the week of May 12. This new system will not apply to RWS medical staff. Mark your calendars now.

In addition to timekeeping, the new system will provide employees an opportunity to request time off without filing a paper request.

Managers will have to undergo longer training

# RWS Rehabilitation and Specialty Hospitals

On April 2, a town hall was held for the Roosevelt Warm Springs staff that would be transferred to a new nonprofit, the Roosevelt Warm Springs Rehabilitation and Specialty Hospitals. The 501(c)3 has been established by Georgia Regents Health to continue medical services at the hospitals at Roosevelt Warm Springs, marking one of the final steps in the transition of the hospitals from Roosevelt Warm Springs (RWS) to GRHealth. This comes as RWS continues to broaden its vocational services in order to serve more clients with disabilities.

GRHealth assumed management of the hospitals at Roosevelt Warm Springs in June 2013, in conjunction with the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency and RWS.

"This is a great, sustainable partnership," said GVRA Executive Director Greg Schmieg. "This allows GVRA to continue and expand upon our

vocational efforts at Warm Springs while at the same time ensuring that the quality care that the hospitals provide is maintained for decades to come."

The new entity will become operational July 1.

"Our employees are what make us so successful in our mission," said RWS Executive Director Bill Bulloch. "We appreciate the service of the hospital staff and know that they will continue their good work under Georgia Regents."

The move comes as RWS continues to expand and improve upon its vocational services.

"We're in the business of helping people with disabilities get jobs, and we're going to continue to serve our clients in the best way possible," Bulloch said.

## April is Autism Awareness Month

In order to highlight the growing need for concern and awareness about autism, the Autism Society has been celebrating National Autism Awareness Month since the 1970s. The United States recognizes April as a special opportunity to educate the public about autism and issues within the autism community.

Put on the Puzzle! The Autism Awareness Puzzle Ribbon is the most recognized symbol of the

autism community in the world. Autism prevalence is now one in every 68 children in America.

Show your support for people with autism by wearing the Autism Awareness Puzzle Ribbon – as a pin on your shirt, a magnet on your car, a badge on your blog, or even your Facebook profile picture – and educate folks on the potential of people with autism!