

Happy Birthday GVRA: Agency Unveils New Logos

Photo: Logos from all the GVRA programs, including GIB, DAS, RWS, CSC, BEP, VR and T.E.A.M. 26

As GVRA celebrated its first birthday on July 1st, plans to publicly launch a new identity and brand were already underway. Early in 2013, the agency invested in researching, defining, and developing the branding initiative. GVRA leadership, its programs and stakeholders provided input through extensive meetings. A company or agency's brand is derived from who you are, who you want to be and who people perceive you to be.

At the Leadership Conference in Macon on July 16th, agency leaders and supervisors received a sneak preview of the agency and program logos resulting from the branding efforts. The foundation of any brand is the logo. Internal and external communications including emails, letterhead, website and promotional materials will integrate the logo(s) to communicate our new brand.

Particularly as a new state agency, branding is important for GVRA. The brand of our agency and its programs is much more than business cards or letterhead: it is a promise of exceptional service to our clients. Beginning in August, GVRA will begin to systematically release the components of our new look!

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Photos: Various pictures from the first annual GVRA Leadership Conference

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Photos: Various pictures from The Second Mile Theme event

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In the Spotlight: GVRA Board Member Don Parks

Photo: Don Parks with Governor Deal. As a retired VR District Director and personal friend of Governor Deal, GVRA Board Member Don Parks has proven to be an essential component of the initial GVRA Board.

Photo: Don Parks with GIB staff members. He has enjoyed many of the Board meetings and site visits, including the one to Georgia Industries for the Blind.

Governor Deal gave the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency a tremendous asset when he appointed Don Parks to the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services Board. Don retired from the state of Georgia with 34 years of service mostly in the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve their employment goals.

After earning his Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Piedmont College, Don coached high school basketball for about eight years. He changed career paths to join the VR team. While working with VR, Don earned his Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Georgia and worked his way up to District Director over 29 counties in

north Georgia.

Don and his wife Nell live in Murrayville, and they have a unique perspective in being good friends with Governor Deal and his wife. Shortly after retiring from VR, Don joined Governor Deal's first campaign for Congress and thoroughly enjoyed the experience of traveling all over the district with him. Don and Nell assisted in that first winning campaign and has served as a friend and advisor for over twenty years.

Don said that he doesn't know of any better purpose for an organization than that of GVRA. "We can't perform miracles, but we can give a lot of help for individuals with disabilities to go to work. People with disabilities don't want a handout –they want a hand up". That's what they get from GVRA. Now Don says he is focused on helping GVRA get the exposure we need and the funding to best serve our clients.

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Business Enterprise Program

Photo: Mr. Bob Matuszak, BEP vendor (far right) and Elizabeth "Liz" McGarey, BEP Training Coordinator (third from left) at the CDC facility.

Photo: Mr. Frank Joiner prepares food for the Action Station.

The Business Enterprise Program opened Café 21 located within the main campus of the Center for Disease Control (CDC) on July 8th. The Café was formerly operated by a major foodservice company until licensed blind vendor Manager, Robert "Bob" Matuszak decided he wanted to assert his personal foodservice management skills and run the operation himself.

Mr. Matuszak has had the constant support and foodservice technical assistance of the BEP Training Coordinator, Elizabeth “Liz” McGarey; Program Manager, Teresa Eggleston; BE Counselor, Chris Okoye; Contract Specialist, Lynn Tallant and BE Equipment Coordinator, Danny Murr.

CDC personnel have been ecstatic over the facility improvements the BEP made. Average sales for the first week exceeded program expectations. Way to go BEP!

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Disability Adjudication Services

Photo: Awilda Danko and Joellen Chapman present Samandra “Sam” Collins the DAS July 2013 Employee of the Month Award.

A note from Awilda Danko, Director, Disability Adjudication Services (DAS):

DAS finished this State Fiscal Year (SFY) on a great note. The agency cleared a total of 156,627 claims this SFY. We cleared 15,105 more initial claims than last year. For the last quarter our initial claims accuracy rate was 96.2%. For May 2013, our processing time was 111.4 days. The service that we provide at DAS impacts the lives of so many Georgia citizens. We at DAS are proud of the work that we do and are committed to providing the best service possible. My thanks to all DAS staff for a productive SFY 2013. I look forward to an even more productive SFY 2014.

Employee of the Month for DAS:

Samandra “Sam” Collins is a person that can turn challenges into oppor-

tunities. In the area of Agency Commitment, Sam received the July 2013 Employee of the Month award based on the recommendation from her supervisor, Joellen Chapman. Joellen noted that Sam came to the Training Unit during a time of transition and jumped into the position with both feet: “The Training Unit was understaffed and in the process of planning and prepping for a new Adjudicator Training Class, so there was no time for a soft welcome. Sam immediately demonstrated a superior willingness to learn the ropes. With her ready smile and outstretched hand, she has proven herself an invaluable Training team member.”

Sam excels in her duties, steps up to the plate without hesitation and often takes on unassigned duties. She adopted the Training Unit motto, “Flexible, Fluid and Flowing”, as her own. She quickly learned to navigate the new Video Service Delivery equipment, helping establish class protocols to make taking a class using the equipment a positive experience. She has researched and planned Lunch and Learn opportunities, with classes that are most beneficial to staff. She has worked hard to revise and refurbish training materials and classes to provide employees the required knowledge and resources.

Samandra’s attitude, work ethic, and knowledge truly are a boon to DAS. “The Training Unit and DAS are immensely lucky to have such an individual as part of our staff,” noted Ms. Chapman.

Morale Building Committee Making A Difference:

The newly formed DAS Morale Building Committee (MBC) has already begun making an impact. In response to employee concerns regarding freshly

cooked food available within a reasonable distance of the Stone Mountain office, the MBC arranged for food truck visits on a trial basis. The first such visit was by Smiley's Street Eats on July 18th. LaQuanda Harper and Tommie Pippin are the MBC Co-Chairs. Other members of the Committee are: Carol McChesney, Susan Lloyd, Kathy Beatty, Amber Henderson, Takeeya Lee, Tonya Scott, Jessie Reeves, Sandra Richards, LaQuisha Cokley, Shelia Baskin, Wendy McGee, Sharon Stone-McGlade and Meg Anderson-King.

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Georgia Industries for the Blind

Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB) employees of the year David Iddins and John W. Roberts Jr. have been nominated for two national awards and will be recognized for their accomplishments during National Industries for the Blind (NIB) Annual Training Conference and Expo on October 9-11 in National Harbor, Maryland.

NIB, which coordinates efforts between associated agencies and the federal government to create and sustain employment for people who are blind, established two prestigious awards: the Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year Direct Labor Award and the Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award.

David Iddins is the nominee for the Peter J. Salmon Direct Labor Employee of the Year Award, named after the late Dr. Salmon, one of the nation's outstanding advocates for people who are blind. David is an exceptional, experienced sewing operator at the GIB Griffin Plant. David demonstrates a great

attitude towards his work, consistently grading in the high percentile for quality and productivity. He is cross trained on several different capacities in the Sewing and Packaging Department and is the Computer Lab instructor, teaching computer fundamentals along with assistive technology.

John Roberts Jr., nominee for the Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award, has been employed with GIB Bainbridge Plant for the past 9 years. John, a material handler, keeps the production floor supplied with raw materials in a timely manner and transports finish goods efficiently into the warehouse. He is trained to operate most machinery within the plant and is a cheerful team player, always willing to assist his peers and supervisors. Born with congenital toxoplasmosis, John has always been quite independent and a self-motivator, seldom yielding to the limitations of his blindness. The Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award is named after the late Dr. Samuelson, a leader in upward mobility and placement programs for people who are blind, and it recognizes an individual who demonstrates career advancement at an NIB associated agency.

Congratulations David and John on your nominations.

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Roosevelt Warm Springs

Photo: Elijah Carter, certified vocational rehabilitation counselor in the Statesboro office, gives the key-note address at the RWS student graduation.

Photo: Roosevelt Warm Springs graduates smile for the camera. The students return to their home towns now in search for employment.

Students Graduate at Roosevelt Warm Springs:

Twenty-six students from all over Georgia participated in graduation ceremonies June 28 at Roosevelt Warm Springs.

Wearing caps and gowns, students walked across the Roosevelt Hall auditorium stage to receive their diplomas. Each student also had an opportunity to address a large crowd of family and friends gathered at Warm Springs to celebrate their accomplishments. Participation in the graduation ceremony indicates that students have successfully completed their vocational rehabilitation program and are returning home to continue their education or seek employment.

Elijah Carter, certified rehabilitation counselor in the Statesboro office, gave the key note address during the ceremony. Keith Horton, Commissioner of the Georgia DHD and former GVRA Deputy Director also spoke during the ceremony as did Lynn Vellinga, interim GVRA Executive Director and Chief Financial Officer of the DHS.

The Roosevelt Warm Springs Vocational Rehabilitation Program has held graduation ceremonies for its departing students for many years. The next

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Photo: Student Alec Ogburn makes a farewell speech during graduation ceremonies.

Graduating students take their places in Roosevelt Hall Auditorium during ceremonies held recently at Roosevelt Warm Springs.

The Roosevelt Singers perform during the graduation ceremonies held recently in Warm Springs. The singers are RWS employees Mike Swetnam (left) and Kay Harbin (third from left), and community volunteers Lee Daniel (seated) and Lisa Thompson (right).

The Roosevelt Singers perform during graduation ceremonies June 28 at Roosevelt Warm Springs. The singers are vocational students who perform popular songs in sign language.

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Vocational Rehabilitation Program

Georgia Welcomes Return of WIPA Services:

GVRA Vocational Rehabilitation program is pleased to announce that as of August 1st, we will be providing Work Incentive Planning and Assistance (WIPA) services to our customers who receive Social Security disability benefits. We recently secured a cooperative agreement funding with Social Security Administration (SSA) to provide these services under our project name of GROUP (Guiding Removing Obstacles and Unlocking Potential).

GROUP is dedicated to assisting Georgians who receive Social Security disability benefits based on transition from dependence on public benefits to paid employment and greater economic self-sufficiency. GROUP assists individuals between the ages of 14 and full retirement age with any type of disability who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or both and want to pursue work goals. GROUP will provide information, analysis and assistance on how employment will impact their Social Security and other federal or state benefits.

Shanti Aaron, VR Employment Support Manager, will supervise the four Community Work Incentive Coordinators that are currently posted for recruitment who will provide the GROUP services.

Photo: VR client Megan Kennedy smiles at the camera.

Megan Kennedy: A VR Success Story:

Megan was referred to the Vocational Rehabilitation program in 2005 as a student at Gainesville State College. When Megan was asked what she would like to be doing five years from now, Megan responded, “I want to be a teacher”. Megan was capable of successfully completing the academics, but she encountered tremendous depression and anxiety.

Throughout the process Megan worked with her VR counselor, and received services that would allow her to learn to cope and manage her depression and anxiety. Megan was able to successfully complete a program of study through the University of North Georgia. During her teaching internship and her last semester, the stresses of teaching became apparent so VR advised Megan to consider business writing since she is gifted in this area. She began working with the Regional Employment Specialist toward this goal and was successfully placed in a position on March 15, 2013.

Megan is currently is employed with ProCare Rx in Gainesville as a proposal consultant earning \$14.75/hour. Her position also includes medical, dental, vision and life insurance. Her final comments to her counselor, Teresa Leahy, before closing her case were: “Thank you so much for all your help! You have no idea how much it meant to me. I wouldn’t have gotten this far without you and Ms. Roper and I greatly appreciate everything you

have both done for me.”

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Photo: VR Client Juan Martin with Lyn Unhold, Managing Partner, and the LongHorn Steakhouse Regional Director.

Juan Martin: A VR Success Story:

Juan Martin met his transition counselor, Inger Neal, when he was still in high school. At the time, he stated that his vocational objective was to work with animals so VR placed Juan at the local Human Society for Community Work Adjustment training. Unfortunately at the end of the training period, there were no paid positions available. His love of animals outweighed his desire to be paid and, two years later, Juan continues to volunteer at the Human Society.

His desire to work and earn money led to a successful closure with LongHorn Steakhouse in Cornelia as their morning shift Cleaner. Some of his duties include: turning on the lights, sweeping, mopping, vacuuming the dining area and restrooms; emptying trash cans; cleaning the parking lot and filling 200-250 butter cups in the kitchen. LongHorn has proven to be an exceptional company to partner with as the manager allowed VR to provide personal in-house training and follow-up.

He continues to be very happy with his job. With the support of his family, he has never been late or missed one day of work.

Juan is a wonderful example of self-determination and the partnership VR can establish with local businesses. With Juan's dedication as an example,

anyone can accomplish their goals and become a productive and fulfilled member of their community.

“The Challenge of the Second Mile”

“What is the true nature of Rehabilitation? I am prejudiced without apology. I know of no other enterprise, public or private, offering a greater opportunity to serve, or that is engaged in a more worthwhile or rewarding task. No other organized endeavor is more enmeshed with the basic American ideals of personal dignity, the intrinsic worth of the individual and the right of every disabled citizen to achieve his maximum physical, social and economic potential. Our work is with people, and our ideals of service will not be faultless until we have earnestly taken the best we have to the highest we know.” ~ Dr. A. Polk Jarrell, former state VR Director, on the merits of choosing rehabilitation as a career

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Photo: During the Leadership Conference, a poster board with the new logos was provided to allow attendees to send personal “Get Well Soon” wishes to our Executive Director, Greg Schmiege.

Photo: Attendees at the first annual Friends Helping Friends VBS Camp smile at the camera.

Donations in Memory Of Patrick Parks Support Camp for Children with Special Needs:

The First Annual Friends Helping Friends VBS Camp at McWilliams Park (June 24-27) was a huge success with participants from Elbert, Hart & Oglethorpe counties! Donations made to Friends Helping Friends in memory of Patrick Parks, recently deceased son of GVR Services Board Member

Don Parks and his wife Nell, provided a wonderful opportunity for several children who have special needs to attend the unforgettable camp.

Children and young adults with extra special needs, assisted by Friends Helping Friends volunteers, enjoyed exciting sports mini-camps lead by local coaches such as Challenger League type team baseball, tennis games, cheer-leading, and also fun basketball activities lead by FHF Founding Officer Katie McCall, daughter of State Representative Tom McCall. The packed schedule included exciting lessons, music, and awesome crafts.