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May 2016

# What is Able Georgia?

The move towards the new GVRA branding of Able Georgia came out of necessity. When GVRA first moved out of the Department of Labor (DOL) in 2012, it was clear that some programs and services would need to be provided by external state agencies until a new infrastructure could be developed.

As a result, GVRA entered into an agreement with DOL to provide IT services. Over that time, GVRA paid millions of dollars to Labor to provide IT support, all the while putting together the pieces necessary to handle such support in house. This transition came to completion earlier this year, but a problem remained. DOL owned the existing [gvra.ga.gov](http://gvra.ga.gov) domain, and the agency needed to find a new domain to completely separate all information technology ties.

Various alternative domain names were discussed, and after several meetings on the subject, the phrase “Able Georgia” was chosen. Many of you have probably noticed the change already. If your email address hasn’t already changed to [First-Name.LastName@ablegeorgia.ga.gov](mailto:First-Name.LastName@ablegeorgia.ga.gov), it will soon.

But that’s only part of the Able Georgia story.

***“Able Georgia does much to speak to what’s possible for the agency in the coming years and the potential that resides in us all.”***

As readers of the GVRA monthly newsletter know, the agency is currently in the middle of easily the largest and most purposeful transformation in its short history. This effort, called Project Horizon, is looking at all aspects of the agency, from personnel to titles to the VR processes to how contact is made with clients to how the agency gauges success. To put it bluntly, it is comprehensive, and its end goals are ambitious.

GVRA Executive Director Greg Schmiege has made it clear. Within the next three years, the goal of the agency is to serve 100,000 Georgians annually and ensure that half of those find jobs.

While change can be

disconcerting, transformation shouldn’t be. It should be encouraging, not only to employees but also to clients and to the businesses who employ them. Of course, not everything that’s encompassed in the Project Horizon initiative can be derived from the name of a new branding effort, but Able Georgia does much to speak to what’s possible for the agency in the coming years and the potential that resides in us all.

Where there’s disability, there’s ability but at the same time, abilities don’t negate disability or the things that make each one of us unique. These things coexist, and GVRA understands that.

The Able Georgia initiative will launch fully on July 1, though you may see the logo used before then in some capacity.

As part of the launch, all staff will be receiving “swag” items rebranded with the proper logo, as well as business cards and appropriately-branded apparel. If you have any questions about Able Georgia, please contact Rob-in Folsom or John Boan.

# Staff Recognition



This space will feature regular updates on GVRA staff around the state. Our staff does amazing work. From Gainesville to Savannah to Waycross and to Carrollton, agency staff works tirelessly to serve those who need us the most, and they deserve recognition for it.

Pictured top left from left is Human Resources Manager Dawnn Johnson with Betty Genovar from GIB Human Resources. Dawnn was presented with the Above and Beyond Recognition Award from the staff at GIB.



Below that is the staff of the Columbus VR unit. Starting in the front row from left is RUM Doreene Carlisle, OA Susan Cabrera, CA Azure Odum and CA Daphne Smith. In the middle row is CRC Lila Young, CRC Nakisial Cromwell, CRC JaLisa Givins, CRC Shannon Barnhill and CRC Glennie Melton. In the back row is CRC Charles Graddick, CA Larry Price and CRC Ronald Henry.

“We, the Columbus Team, strive to provide the best customer service possible. We want to not only be number one in helping persons with disabilities get jobs but we also want to be number one in the hearts of our clients,” said RUM Doreene Carlisle.



At left is the Admissions Department for RWS and Cave Springs, including Customer Service Specialist Tina McClendon, Customer Service Specialist Tammy Howe, Admissions Specialist Melinda Sabo, Admissions Manager Theresa Williams, Admissions Nurse Sandy Swint and Operations Analyst Gena Ogletree.

# *ABLE Act Gets Gov's Signature*



With his signature, Governor Nathan Deal recently made the ABLE Act law in Georgia, ensuring that citizens with disabilities can now save more money while still maintaining benefits.

The new law provides individuals with disabilities the same types of flexible savings tools that all other Americans have through college savings, healthcare savings and individual retirement accounts. The legislation also contains Medicaid fraud protection against abuse and a Medicaid payback provision

when the beneficiary passes away.

The bill intends to ease financial strains faced by individuals with disabilities by making tax-free savings accounts available to cover qualified expenses such as education, housing and transportation.

The ABLE Act would also supplement benefits provided through private insurances, the Medicaid program, the supplemental security income program, the beneficiary's employment and other

sources. It builds on the foundation set forth by the ADA. While the ADA prohibits discriminating against individuals with disabilities, the ABLE Act seeks to level the financial playing field by allowing families affected by disabilities to utilize the progress made by the ADA by saving for the future.

By enacting the ABLE Act, Georgia became the 33rd state to authorize similar savings accounts for individuals with disabilities and their caregivers.

# *LaBreck at KSU Graduation*

Rehabilitation Services Administration Director Janet LaBreck was recently on hand at Kennesaw State University to celebrate the graduates of its Academy for Inclusive Learning and Social Growth.

LaBreck was the keynote speaker of the event, which showcased one of the Academy's biggest graduating classes. She commended the students for their hard work and urged them to keep it up as they

move into their careers.

Formed several years ago, the Academy helps students with disabilities gain job skills and ensures close work with a full-time VR counselor.

RSA Commissioner Janet LaBreck, back row and third from the left, stands with graduates from KSU's Inclusion Program.



## *GVRA Staff Hires*

Please welcome some new hires to GVRA (Ed. Note: This list is updated as of May 5): Shemika Bryant (Atlanta Unit), Regina Jones (Atlanta Unit), Dionne Perry (College Park Unit), David Smith (College Park Unit), Tia Anenja Thomas (College Park Unit), James Elliott (Marietta Unit), Carlotta Hudson (Tifton Unit),

Lucretia Tolbert (Tifton Unit), Eugenia Sambou (Local School Agreement), Kaeli Bishop (RWS), Randy Mahone (RWS), Amanda Marie Noles (GIB), Ada Velasquez (GIB), Stephanie Nicole Andrews (GIB), Akeemi Teiwan Burns (GIB), Stacy D. Linzy (GIB), Tameka Yaschika Lyles (GIB).

If you see these folks make sure you make them feel welcome. As always, if you see staff going above and beyond, we'd love to recognize them in the monthly newsletter. Simply email Communications Manager John Boan, and include a brief summary of why that person should be recognized.

# *Savannah Job Fair a Success*



The Savannah Civic Center recently played host to job fair that featured more than a dozen employers and more than 100 attendees.

Special thanks to Business Services Director Robert Nibbs who spoke to employers prior to the event about the advantages of hiring individuals with disabilities and why a partnership with GVRA makes good business sense.



# A Historic Partnership

GVRA recently entered into a partnership with Sodexo, a French-based quality of life company that employs more than 9,000 people in Georgia alone.



Quan Tat with Business Services shakes hands with Anthony Chambers from Sodexo.

The partnership came as part of ongoing efforts by Sodexo to increase the

number of individuals with disabilities that they employ by 20 percent, adding further diversity to their already diverse international workforce.

“This is a great opportunity for us to not only help a leading international business with their staffing needs but also to help place our clients in well-paying jobs,” said GVRA Business Services Director Robert Nibbs. “We are tremendously pleased to have Sodexo as a strategic partner.”

Sodexo Group is the world leader for quality of life

services with more than 380,000 employees on 30,600 sites in 80 countries.

In North America, Sodexo's 125,000 employees work to improve the quality of life for its 6,000 clients and the more than 10 million customers they touch every day.

If your business would like to learn about partnership opportunities and potential tax credits, please contact Quan Tat with GVRA Business Services at 404-561-1623 or by email at [Quan.Tat@ablegeorgia.ga.gov](mailto:Quan.Tat@ablegeorgia.ga.gov).

## Ext. Affairs Listening Tour

Over the last six months, members of the External Affairs team have travelled across the state visiting VR offices and talking to staff.

The purpose of these trips was twofold; they would primarily serve to help introduce field staff to members of External Affairs and allow them to better understand the workings of Constituent Services, which acts as a liaison between the clients and the counselors.

The second purpose of the trip was to hear from staff

about how External Affairs could better meet their needs in the coming months and years.

We appreciate hearing from so many staff members, and we appreciate everyone taking the time out of their busy schedules to meet with us.

We take what we heard very seriously, and many of the concerns (namely surrounding provider relations, especially in the more rural parts of the state) are currently being

addressed through the Project Horizon initiative.

All of your questions, comments and concerns were passed along to the Appropriate Individuals, and if you still have pressing issues or needs, please feel free to reach out to any member of the External Affairs staff.

From the entire External Affairs team, thank you for your service and your continued commitment to help Georgians with disabilities.

# 1,684 Miles, a Computer and a Job

Hernando Delacruz was born in Barranquilla, Colombia, a village in the northwest corner of the country and near the Caribbean Sea. That's where his journey started. Seven years removed and 1,684 miles away from Barranquilla, Delacruz has made a new home in Georgia's capitol city.

Like all journeys, this one

information system Technologies in Colombia, where the stigma surrounding disability made it difficult to find a career in the field he was so passionate about.

So he moved. He had family in Athens, and in 2009—hardly speaking any English—he relocated there.

Language was going to be

translate to similar classes in the states, he needed help. That's where VR came in. Working with a team of counselors in Athens, it was agreed that he should attend Roosevelt Warm Springs (RWS). There, he thrived, interning in the campus' IT department and proving that his skills translated well from one continent to the next.

He graduated from RWS in April of 2014, and the job hunt continued. Then, more than a year later, his Counselor, at this point Richard Smith, suggested he start applying for IT jobs with the state. And it worked.

As fate would have it, his timing couldn't have been better. GVRA was in the process of building out its own IT department, and he had the knowledge and the skills to make a positive impact on the team.

He began work at the agency's administrative office in Atlanta, and he's been a quick study.

"It was hard. It was hard work," Delacruz said. "But I knew that my knowledge was good and would get me where I wanted to go."

had its share of unique challenges. Delacruz was born with cerebral palsy, a permanent movement disorder that can lead to problems with muscle control, but he knew one surefire way to continue along his path toward where he wanted to go: knowledge.

He first attending classes in

another hurdle, but to Delacruz, it was a question with an answer with which he was already familiar. To overcome adversity, he would use his knowledge.

He taught himself English using Rosetta Stone software, and then the job hunt began. But because his classes in Colombia didn't

