

MOVING FASTER



We're committed to taking service to the next level.

August 2015





Greg's Greetings

SOME BIG GOALS FOR THIS YEAR

One thing is for sure with our agency, you cannot say that there is not enough to do! It does feel like we have been running for the past three years, and I don't see that slowly down much this year. In many ways, GVRA has stabilized as an agency. Our infrastructure is pretty much in place. Our funding situation is much improved. Program staffing is better than it's been. We've been able to give some pay raises with more to come this year as well, and we have greater visibility with the state legislature. So what's next you might ask. The answer is that our focus now should be on improving our effectiveness and our efficiency. As you have hopefully heard me say before, our mission of service to others is our highest priority; and now the pace will be geared toward making a quantum leap forward regarding our mission.

Simply stated our major goals for this year are the following:

Significantly increase the number of individuals served and number of jobs obtained.

Significantly increase the business and employment opportunities.

Maximize our effectiveness and efficiency for those applying for SSA benefits.

To do this, we really can't slow down. I'm reminded of one of my favorite Doobie Brothers' songs "It Keeps You Running," and that's what I expect this year to be like. The good news is that we have the privilege of serving Georgians who traditionally have had a hard time and who can really benefit from what all of you do. I personally feel so blessed to do what we do, and I am always willing to keep running for something as noble as that.

GVRA Newsletter Changes

This month marks the end of the GVRA newsletter as we all know it, but it's not exactly going away. Beginning in October, GVRA will publish its first seasonal magazine.

You heard that right. We're committed to bringing you high-quality content that not only informs but tells the narrative of GVRA: that our mission isn't just about jobs; it's about the people we help gain employment and find independence through that employment.

The editorial team is already hard at work, but we still want to hear from you. Do you have a success story? Is there something interesting happening in the Georgia disability community? Do you have an idea for a recurring feature or column? Let your voice be heard.

For suggestions, questions or comments on the new magazine-style format, please contact GVRA Communications Manager John Boan at 404.623.9159 or email him at john.boan@gvra.ga.gov.

Jamming for a Cause

The third annual Friends Helping Friends Jam Fest and Taste of Elberton is fast approaching, and you're invited.

While dining at the delicious food court prepared by local restaurants and caterers, enjoy inspirational family entertainment provided by local and area musicians. State Representative Tom McCall will auction off cakes, so bring your sweet tooth along with your family and friends.

Donations will be received at the door. All proceeds benefit Friends Helping Friends Club, Inc., a 501(c)3 charitable organization providing exceptional educational opportunities such as school trips, special events, lessons, crafts and school supplies for Elbert County students of all ages who face special challenges at no cost to the school

system or to the students served. All FHF members and workers receive no compensation. FHF is dedicated to the memory of Bud McCall.

Visit FriendsHelpingFriendsClub.com for more info about the event and to learn more about the great work Friends Helping Friends does every year.



Friends Helping Friends Club

Pictured below: Musicians at last year's Jam Fest and Taste of Elberton rock out.



WIPA Gets a Facelift

The Georgia Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Program under the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency now has a new customer care number and service area map.

The Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Program (WIPA), which educates and aids individuals on SSI or SSDI who want to work and gain self sufficiency, recently underwent a few changes.

The number of counties covered under the WIPA grant by GVRA has swelled to 119, with the remaining Georgia counties being covered by WIPA services through the Shepherd Center.

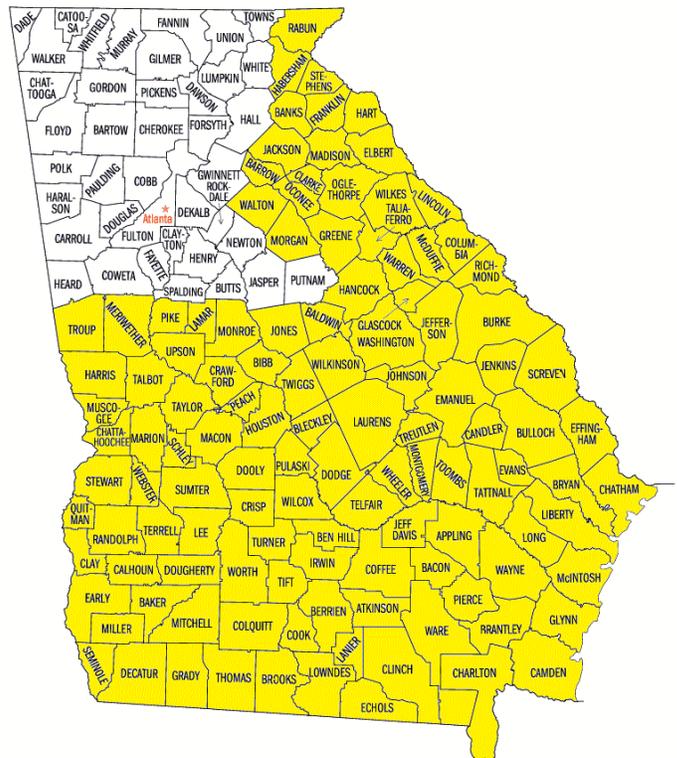
In addition, the GVRA branch of WIPA now has a toll-free customer care number. All questions related to working while on SSI or SSDI can be directed to 844-FOR-WIPA (367-9472).

“Our mission is to help Georgians with disabilities get jobs,” said GVRA Executive Director Greg Schmieg. “WIPA is another tool in our toolbox.”

The counties covered by GVRA include: Appling, Atkinson, Bacon, Baker, Baldwin, Banks, Barrow, Ben Hill, Berrien, Bibb, Bleckley, Brantley, Brooks, Bryan, Bulloch, Burke, Calhoun, Camden, Candler, Charlton, Chatham, Chattahoochee, Clarke, Clay, Clinch, Coffee, Colquitt, Columbia, Cook, Crawford, Crisp, Decatur, Dodge, Dooly, Dougherty, Early, Echols, Effingham, Elbert, Emanuel, Evans, Franklin, Glascock, Glynn, Grady, Greene, Habersham, Hancock, Harris, Hart, Houston, Irwin, Jackson, Jeff Davis, Jefferson, Jenkins, Johnson, Jones, Lamar, Lanier, Laurens, Lee, Liberty, Lincoln, Long, Lowndes, Macon, Madison, Marion, McDuffie, McIntosh,

Meriwether, Mitchell, Monroe, Montgomery, Morgan, Muscogee, Oconee, Oglethorpe, Peach, Pierce, Pike, Pulaski, Quitman, Rabun, Randolph, Richmond, Schley, Screven, Seminole, Stephens, Stewart, Sumter, Talbot, Taliaferro, Tattnall, Taylor, Telfair, Terrell, Thomas, Tift, Toombs, Treutlen, Troup, Turner, Twiggs, Upson, Walton, Ware, Warren, Washington, Wayne, Webster, Wheeler, Wilcox, Wilkes, Wilkinson and Worth.

To learn more about GVRA and its efforts to maximize employment opportunities and independence for Georgians with disabilities, visit www.gvra.georgia.gov.



The map above shows the counties that will now be covered by GVRA. The counties in white are now covered by the Shepherd Center.

An RWS Graduation

Family, friends and staff recently filled the Roosevelt Hall auditorium for the June graduation ceremony at Roosevelt Warm Springs Vocational Rehabilitation Campus (RWS).

RWS holds graduation ceremonies twice a year to celebrate the accomplishments of its students who are returning home armed with new skills and enthusiasm to achieve their goals. Several graduating students, it was announced, already had jobs in their home communities. A total of 44 students participated in the graduation ceremony on June 19th. The event included a motivational speech by former student LaShawn Long, a vocal performance of "Wind Beneath My Wings" by graduate Sarah Pergola and a moving sign language presentation of "I Believe I Can Fly" by the Roosevelt Warm Springs Signers.

LaShawn, 25, graduated from Roosevelt Warm Springs in December 2013 and has been working as a Peer Support Specialist at Access2Independence in Columbus since October 2014. He shared the keynote speaker duties with his employer, Nichole Davis, Executive Director of Access2Independence, a non-profit organization that helps people with disabilities live independently. LaShawn encouraged the current graduates to never give up on their

dreams. Nichole, service dog beside her, shared her experience of growing up with epilepsy and reminded the graduates that having a disability does not make one less than other people, just different.

After receiving their graduation certificates from the keynote speakers and Roosevelt Warm Springs Executive Director Bill Bulloch, each student had an opportunity to make a speech to the hundreds of people gathered in the Roosevelt Hall auditorium. Many graduates stood at the podium and thanked their family and friends and talked about what Roosevelt Warm Springs experience has meant to them.

The graduates may be leaving Warm Springs, but the staff of RWS hopes to keep in contact with them as they return home and enter the workforce. Trey Stewart, another former RWS student who now works fulltime at Warm Springs, will call the graduates at regular intervals to document how they are progressing on their goals.

The information that Mr. Stewart collects will help RWS to continually improve its programs and services. The next graduation will take place in December.



DAS Employee of the Month

This nomination was submitted by David Crozier in the category of Customer Service.

but also shows that Ms. Yee reads and utilizes policy in the performance of her job.

"Ms. Yee has a history of contact with the Quality Assurance (QA) Unit. Ms. Yee contacted the QA unit when the new Failure to Cooperate (FTC) procedures were put in place. Her questions were thoughtful and showed concern for correctly following policy and providing good service to applicants. Ms. Stone-McGlade reports that Ms. Yee performs her job conscientiously and always considers the welfare of the applicant. Ms. Yee provides global customer service by notifying adjudicators regarding issues pending on a claim.

David, in my role as FTC for Consultative Examination (CE) reminder calls in Athens, I have had the opportunity to use the service three times. I have experienced communication with claimants (CLs) who speak Bosnian, Spanish and Hmong. I wanted you to know how wonderful the service is and how simple it is to use. It has been a wonderful experience to be able to "talk" with people about their appointments and each time, the CL has had a question that they had not been able to ask previously. Thank you for helping us work closely with CLs who have no other voice.

Lisa

Below is an email received from Ms. Yee that not only demonstrates excellent customer service

GIB Celebrates the ADA

On July 17th, Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB) joined forces with the Center for Independent Living, Bain Inc, to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

GIB, who is the largest employer of blind individuals in the region, has been a longtime sponsor of the annual ADA activities hosted by Bain Inc.

This year's ADA festivities were kicked off by a march through the streets of the community, which culminated at the Bainbridge Middle School Cafeteria where a formal program was held.

Some of the highlights of the program included the reading of a proclamation signed by Bainbridge

Mayor Edward Reynolds and some inspiring words from State Rep. Darleen Taylor.

Also included in the program were speakers from agencies serving individuals with disabilities such as GVRA, GDOL, Easter Seals and Friendship House.

Luis Narimatsu, GIB PR coordinator, was one of three speakers representing the agency this year. Narimatsu recapped the positive economic impact GIB has on the community, including the fact that over \$3 million was paid out to employees in wages and benefits last fiscal year.

"These monies go into the community, and when you take into consideration the local multiplier

GIB and the ADA Continued

effect, the amount of secondary spending produced has a major impact in terms of economic development in the community," Luis said.

Mike Lane, GIB Call Center Supervisor, recalled the many obstacles and challenges he faced to find meaningful employment before coming to GIB.

Mike, who is a Florida State University graduate, started at GIB as an administrative assistant. He took advantage of supervisor training and now is in charge of the GIB Call Center.

"In the call center, we make cold calls to employers around the state and generate job leads for the GVRA BRS team," Mike said. "In June, of the 59 job placements made by the BRS team, 21 came from

from job leads produced by the call center agents, so not only are we employing blind people in the call center, but we are also helping other individuals with disabilities find employment around the state".

Roger Meredith, a GIB mechanic, shared his story on how he was forced to quit his job as a certified GM mechanic and stay home due to his degrading eyesight.

"After over a year of in-activity I just had to do something," Roger said. "I finally gathered the courage and called GIB. I worked in production for a while, and then I applied for an opening in the maintenance department as a mechanic. Now I get to fix machines like before".



Pictured from left to right are Mike Lane, Roger Meredith and Luis Narimatsu.

BEP Happenings

The BEP is happy to announce the completion of its 2015 trainee class! Wesley Vaughn and John Bellamy completed the licensee candidate training class on August 14.

Congratulations to the BEP's Contract Manager Franklin Hulsey! Frank manages the food service contract in consultation with his teaming partner at Fort Gordon Army post in Columbus. The food service contractor (H&B Inc) continues to provide exceptional food service to military service members. The quality of food service provided by H&B is recognized at the highest levels of the food service chain. H&B makes every effort to keep costs down while providing optimum service.

Recently the Logistic Readiness Center (LRC) at Fort

Gordon was the only installation that received an exceptional rating from the Department of the Army Food Management Inspection. This was in large part to Franklin's efforts and his team exceeding the standards.

Congratulations to new licensee candidate Phyllis Campbell who was recently awarded the Rich's Café snack bar located in the Atlanta Federal Center.

Congrats and farewell to licensed vendor manager Zach Snow who was recently awarded the Adairsville Rest Area vending. Zach is temporarily still managing Zach's Snacks located at #2 Peachtree Street until this role can be filled by a new vendor manager.



Customer Care Helpline
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(844) 367-4872