

# GVRA February 2015



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



# Greg's Greetings

GVRA is now on the downhill side of our third year, but we still can't coast. For those of you who are runners, I know that you are always told to run "through the finish line" and not to let up. So it is with GVRA as well. I know that for many of you, the past thirty-one months have been non-stop changes and non-stop challenges.

I'm sure it has felt like one crazy thing after another, so much so that you can barely catch your breath. You're absolutely correct. We have been running since July 1, 2012 and we're still running today. But it is so important that we keep up the pace because of one reason – our mission.

We cannot lose sight of why we run and why we will continue to push forward. We run and we push because we have the privilege to serve individuals with disabilities; and to me there is no better reason.

Over the past two weeks, I received two emails about individuals whose cases I was personally involved with. The first was in the late 1970's and he was a young man who had spent the first thirty years of his life in a state school because they thought he would never live in the real world.

Through the efforts of a lot of people, he proved them all wrong. He moved into his own apartment, had his own personal care attendants and he got a job for the first time in his life. The second was a young man who

had a bright future until he became the victim of a drive-by shooting and stroke, which left him in a wheelchair. His desire and his determination became the sole reasons he moved forward to getting a job, and now he's a sophomore in college. Both of these individuals taught me the power of persistence. Nothing worth having comes easy.

So here we are two and a half years later, having made a lot of changes, some for the better and probably some for the worse, and we still have tens of thousands of Georgians with disabilities to serve. I don't know about you, but that fact alone keeps me pushing forward.

What you do is so meaningful, and our future is to do even greater things in service to others. So please hang in there. It is worth it.

Thanks so much.

Greg

Do you have something you'd like to see in the newsletter or ideas about how the newsletter can be improved?

We'd love to hear from you. Please email Communications Manager John Peyton Boan at [john.boan@gvra.ga.gov](mailto:john.boan@gvra.ga.gov).

Remember also to follow us on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/gavocationalrehab](http://www.facebook.com/gavocationalrehab)) and on Twitter ([www.twitter.com/georgiavra](http://www.twitter.com/georgiavra)).

Please share this with your friends.

# BEP at the Georgia Capitol

The Business Enterprise Program celebrated “Customer Appreciation Day” on January 28 at the Georgia State Capitol in honor of the 2015 Legislative Session. BEP staff worked with licensee candidate Phyllis Davis to ensure that customers working throughout the Capital were treated to free coffee and cookies.

For the duration of the session, customers can look forward to Chick-Fil-A breakfast biscuits and lunch sandwiches, hot pretzels, popcorn, hotdogs, freshly brewed coffee and hot cookies. Standard snack and beverage vending is also available.

In addition to food service, BEP is also exploring the possibility of opening a cash-less laundromat facility. It’s all part of the agency’s efforts to provide creative business opportunities for individuals with disabilities.



# GIB Upgrades Career Center

Georgia Industries for the Blind recently upgraded the assistive technology software and adaptive devices in its Skill Testing Career Center at its Bainbridge location.

Changes were made to the floor plan of the Skill Testing Career Center in accordance with Standards for Accessible Design, and a new lighting system was installed to increase visibility to all adaptive devices. With this came software upgrades as well.

New adaptive devices were purchased to

replace aging ones such as large digit talking calculator and talking tape measure. Other devices such CCTV’s and magnifiers were also established in the Skill Testing Career Center.

The new and improved Skill Testing Career Center is a vital tool in facilitating assistive technology accommodation requests by job seeking candidates in compliance with the ADA which requires reasonable accommodation in the hiring process. It also helps current employees enhance their skills.

# A Shining Star at RWS

Jordan Collins, a current student at Roosevelt Warm Springs Vocational Rehabilitation Campus, took center stage as a guest speaker during the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services (GVRS) Board meeting on January 14<sup>th</sup> in Atlanta.

Jordan is pursuing her rehabilitation and employment goals in the Business Information Technology Program at Roosevelt Warm Springs (RWS). She is currently enrolled in educational classes in keyboarding, record keeping and data entry as well as demonstrating her new skills as a co-op employee in the RWS Residential & Campus Life Department. She hopes to complete her vocational rehabilitation program in March and participate in the RWS graduation ceremony in June. Jordan will continue to explore job leads in the field of customer service before she returns to her hometown of Gainesville.

Jordan enrolled in the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program at RWS in February 2011 but could not finish her program due to personal reasons. In August 2014, she re-enrolled in the program and “found that the programs and the staff were more student focused than ever before,” she said.

“I truly believe that I made the best decision of my life when I returned to Roosevelt Warm Springs,” Jordan said. “More than ever before, the services and programs at Roosevelt Warm Springs place the student in control by offering students an active role in the decisions that affect their training and career goals.”

Jordan explained that she finds the



programmatic changes at Warm Springs exciting and motivating and that she is the perfect person to articulate these changes from the old model to the new model.

The VR program at RWS is grounded within a person-centered model. By setting goals and planning services around each student, staff are able to provide students with resources to help them meet their individualized needs.

At RWS, Jordan obtained her national certification in customer service from the

National Retail Federation. She also participated in the leadership programs conducted by Residential Advisor Carrie Wilcox.

“I love my leadership class because I am learning different ways to further develop my leadership skills and abilities,” Jordan said.

# Jordan Collins Continued

I have always felt like I am a natural-born leader,” she said. “I work well with my peers, and I am always willing to problem solve with others ... Being at RWS, I can choose to be involved in many leadership opportunities.”

In August 2014, Jordan became a founding member of the Roosevelt Memorial Chapel Leadership Team and is now serving as the second president of that organization. Joining the team, Jordan said, “was the greatest decision I made because the team was like a big family, and I would not trade the experience and the friendships that I made.”

Jordan said she has no regrets in returning to RWS to finish what she started in 2011.

“I have learned so many lessons in a short period of time. The staff and students at RWS have taught me a great deal about life, and I can’t express how wonderful Warm Springs has been to me,” she said. “I would definitely recommend RWS to anyone who might be thinking about or even just considering attending.”



Jordan Collins cuts the ribbon at the grand opening of the Roosevelt Warm Springs Residential Complex in 2011. Also on hand were: Greg Schmiege (left), Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Executive Director; Mark Butler, Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Labor and Ken Dobbs, Chairman of the Roosevelt Warm Springs Development Fund.

# DAS Employee of the Month

The following nomination was submitted by Cathy Chafin.

“I would like to nominate Ms. Stacey Lynn Kelley for employee of the month for the excellent customer service she provides to the citizens of Georgia.

In December, I received an e-mail from one of Stacey’s co-workers regarding a conversation she overheard between a claimant and Stacey. The claimant called her to express her gratitude for all the extra work Stacey did on her claim in order to process an allowance. Stacey called the claimant and her representative on several occasions for clarification in obtaining detailed descriptions of her past work and addressing transferability. As it turns out, the claimant was in pre-foreclosure. Due to Stacey’s diligence, the claimant was able to use the lump sum she received (rather quickly) to get herself out of pre-foreclosure.

Stacey’s stats reflect her commitment to providing excellent customer service too. Her processing time is 66 days and her aged case percentage is 2.5%, all while maintaining a substantive accuracy rating of 100%.

For these reasons, I feel Stacey should be recognized as employee of the month.”



# VR Director Ed James

Through the midpoint of the fiscal year, we have not only stayed on budget but we have implemented a business relations and development strategy that is already showing dividends. On top of that, we are on pace to serve more clients this year than we did last year.

We have six months to go this state fiscal year, let's keep the momentum going on behalf of all the Georgians with disabilities we collectively serve. I can think of no higher calling. Thank you for your dedication and work each day. Think big. Serve more, and do better.

## From VR to the Gold Dome

Kayla Wilson, a member of the State Rehabilitation Council, came to VR in 2006 to address limitations resulting from a learning disability. VR provided services while she was in high school and college including audio books, a testing lab to give her extended time alone to take tests and various programs to help with her reading and writing assignments. These modifications helped Kayla succeed, and she graduated from Georgia Southern University in 2012. After graduating, VR assisted her in preparing her resume for her job search. Kayla is now successfully employed as an accounting manager for Sherman and Hemstreet Real Estate, a major commercial real estate firm in Augusta. Since graduating and obtaining a job, Kayla travels Georgia speaking to high school students with disabilities about her struggles throughout school, self advocacy, post secondary education, and employment after graduation. Kayla has a passion to help, advocate and volunteer for programs assisting people with disabilities. Because of Kayla's hard work and dedication she has been awarded the Harrison Sylvester Award for 2015.

"With my learning disability, college seemed like an insurmountable task," she said. "Fortunately along the way, my VR advocates, counselors and several inspirational instructors helped me make my dreams become my reality."

In late January, Kayla told her story to a joint appropriations subcommittee of the Georgia Legislature. She is pictured below.



# Bringing the Crown to GA

For the first time ever, a Georgia woman is wearing the crown of Ms. Wheelchair USA.

Several months ago, Yvette Pegues was named to the crown. Yvette, who is the mother of two, had this to say about the experience.

“Just a few months ago we didn't even know that pageants to recognize the achievements of women in wheelchairs even existed. Today, I am learning how to promote glamour, self confidence and community service on a national platform as the new, Ms. Wheelchair USA 2014/15. “

Ms. Wheelchair USA was founded more than 17 years ago as a state contest in Ohio. Due to the popularity of the pageant, it soon expanded to its current nationwide scope.

Since winning, Yvette said she hopes to continue to travel and tell her story. Most importantly though, she said she wants to make a real change in the world. To learn more about Yvette and to learn about all the nonprofit organizations she works with, please visit her website at [www.yvettepegues.com](http://www.yvettepegues.com).

Information about Ms. Wheelchair USA can be found here: [www.mswheelchairusa.org](http://www.mswheelchairusa.org).

