

July 2015

**ANYWHERE IS A THREAT
E EVERYWHERE."**

Martin Luther King, Jr.





Greg's Greetings

The Checkered Flag ...

We recently ended the fiscal year, which was somewhat like nearing the end of a race and waiting to cross the line and have the checkered flag fall. So as I look back on what has now been our third year as an agency, I continue to see improvements and growth. We have gained more financial stability. We have improved our overall performance, and we have implemented a lot of new things that will help us in the future. While we may not have won the race yet, we're gaining ground

Unlike most races, however, ours doesn't end with this lap. While we crossed the finish line for last fiscal year, we're now tasked with immediately heading into turn one for this year's race. Most of us didn't even see the checkered flag. We simply showed up for work the next day and the race was on. So as we head into year number four, what should we expect? Well, we should expect to continue going in the same

direction we are heading now, which is to continue to improve. To win the race, we have to be the very best; and to get there we must continue to improve in all aspects of what we do as an agency and as the various programs within the agency. This year, my goal is to see improvements in everything from our services to citizens with disabilities, to the levels of support from the agency to the programs and even to how our staff are treated by managers and supervisors. In all areas, our scores need to go up. I truly believe, and I am completely committed to making our agency, GVRA, the very best agency in the state. More importantly, I want our state, Georgia, to be the very best state in the country with respect to individuals with disabilities. That's when we win the race.

So as we head down this year's first lap, I thank you for all the hard work that you did last year. I thank you for the people that you served, the cases that you processed and adjudicated and the contracts that you completed. You worked hard, and I appreciate your efforts. So keep your seat belt fastened, because we are going to go faster.

A Week of Recognition

The week of June 15 marked the National Disability Professional Week, as recognized by the Georgia Association for Developmental Education.

GADE is the Georgia chapter of the National Association for Developmental Education and comprised of teachers from all levels of education in the state.

So congratulations to everyone who works in the disability field, and a special congratulations to all GVRA employees past and present.

What you do is significant for Georgians with disabilities. It's not an easy vocation, but it's a very necessary vocation. Thank you for your service.

The ADA, Looking Forward

This post comes courtesy of Mark Johnson with the Shepherd Center. It first appeared at www.sunrisegroup.org.

As Justin Dart, Jr. said, “We are not a tragic minority; we are a magnificent, triumphant majority.” Indeed. The history of the civil rights movement is a triumphant one. For the generations of Americans who will grow up with the ADA and others outside the movement, that history may be unknown and the challenges faced by its advocates and allies unthinkable. But its role in the broader civil rights victories of the 20th century reflect back on each of us and our nation’s progress towards ending Discrimination, whatever the source.

The ADA Legacy Project is helping to preserve this past by partnering with those who work to collect, promote and exhibit materials from the civil rights movements. Part of this mission has been demonstrated best by the ADA Legacy Tour. Wrapped in photos from the civil rights movement and making its way across the country, the ADA Legacy Tour’s bus pays tribute to the cross-disability efforts that led to the passage of the ADA in 1990. Inspired by the historic 50-state journey taken by Dart and his wife, Yoshiko, to garner grassroots support for the then yet-to-be-passed ADA, the bus and tour have been expanded since its first launch in 2006-7. Notably, the bus newly features a four-panel display on the history of self-advocacy courtesy of the Museum of disABILITY History in Buffalo, plus: disability history quilts, local and national milestones, new displays on the 2006-7 Road to Freedom Tour, and information about the ADA Legacy Project.

At the ADA Legacy Project, we are celebrating our present by honoring the milestones and accomplishments of the past, including the 25th anniversary of the ADA’s passage on July 26. The ADA did more than acknowledge the rights of people with disabilities to fully participate in all aspects of society; from employment and education, to housing, community inclusion and government participation, it has worked to address and move beyond barriers existing for people with disabilities.

The ADA has fulfilled much of its promise. A 2010 national survey of disability leaders authored by Lex Frieden, who helped craft the ADA, found the “equal opportunity” law for people with disabilities “had more influence on their lives than any other social, cultural or legislative change.” Nearly 60 percent of those surveyed agreed that access to public accommodations, retail and commercial establishments has shown the greatest improvement since the ADA’s passage. Respondents also described remarkable improvements in the area of transportation, and credited the law with making it easier for people with disabilities to gain employment in inclusive settings.

ADA 25
AMERICANS WITH
DISABILITIES ACT 1990-2015

Meet Lamar Burke

Charles L. Burke, better known as Lamar, is celebrating his first year of gainful employment at the Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB) Bainbridge plant.

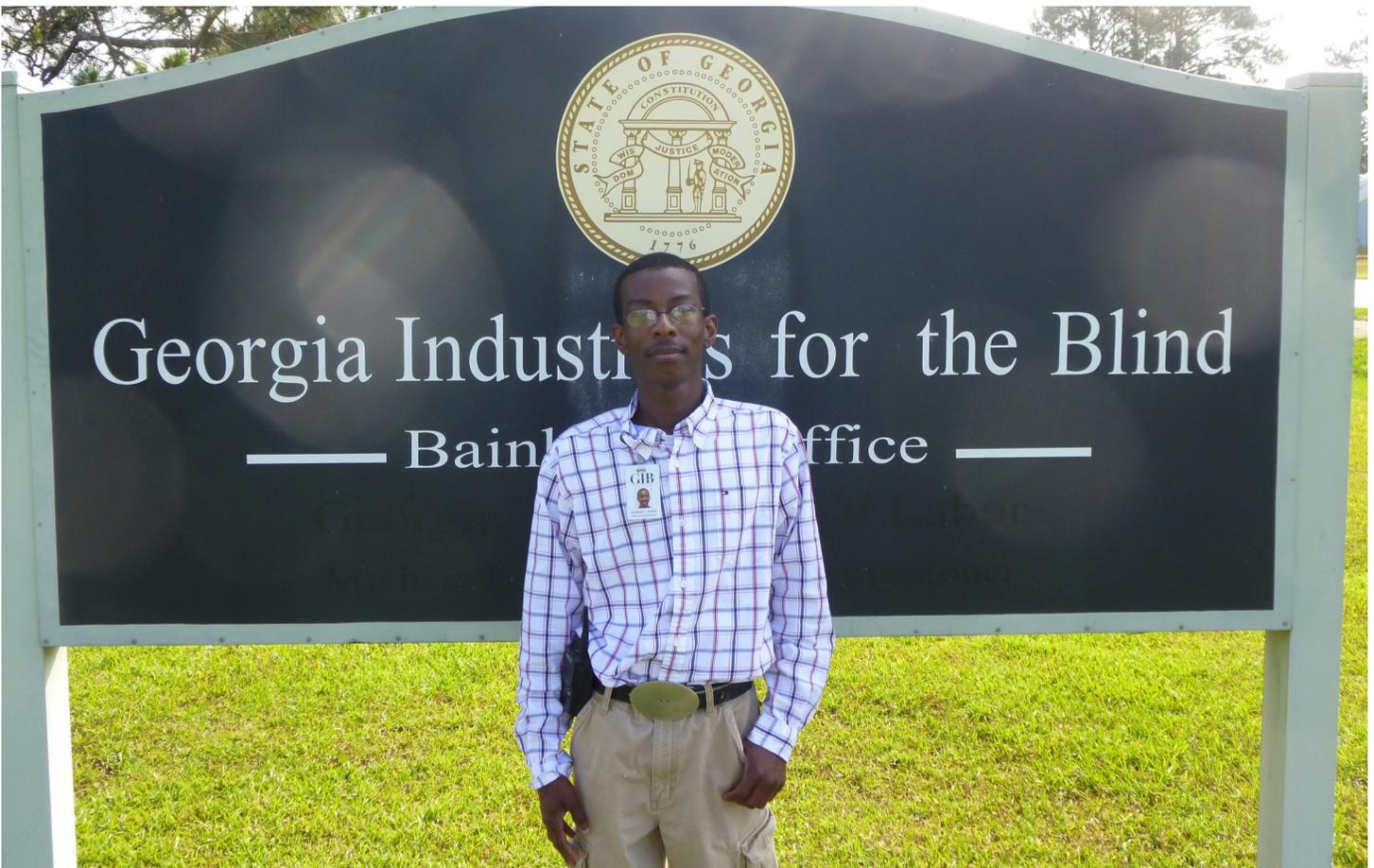
Lamar, a product of the strong collaboration between GIB and the Thomasville Vocational Rehabilitation office, did Community Work Adjustment Training (CWAT) at the Bainbridge plant before being hired.

A native of Bainbridge, Lamar began his CWAT training in the shipping department, where he exceeded expectations completing multiple tasks.

He was later moved into the file folder assembly area where he completed CWAT and proved to be diligent in completing assignments.

A month after completing CWAT, Lamar was notified of an opening for a custodian. His ability to work well with others and strong work ethics were major contributors to a successful job placement with GIB.

For more information, contact the HR department at: (229) 248-2666 ext. 317.



Lamar Burke, who recently received a job with GIB, is a great example of how inter-agency cooperation can do wonders for the people that we serve.

RWS Student Reaches Far

Laura Book grew up in Columbus, Georgia in a blended middle class family. She was the third oldest child in a busy household and believed that ambition would take her where she needed to go. However, at the age of 9, plans changed. Laura was diagnosed with a brain tumor.

The tumor, a benign ganglioglioma growing in her left temporal lobe, caused severe seizures. Laura and her family eventually agreed to a dangerous surgical removal of the tumor although the side effects to this type of surgery could have left Laura deaf, mute, blind and/or brain damaged. Fortunately, the surgery was successful and eliminated her seizures; however, it left Laura with significant memory deficits and a bipolar disorder.

Finishing high school was a struggle for Laura, and her memory deficits made test taking a difficult endeavor. Several of Laura's teachers advised her to give up and drop out of high school. Others, however, encouraged her to not lose faith and to continue on the path toward her high school diploma. In 2001, Laura received her high school diploma from Columbus High School. After high school, Laura continued her education by receiving a certificate in medical coding from Columbus Technical College and then began pursuing her bachelor's degree in communications at Columbus State University.

Despite these achievements, Laura still suffered from painful self-doubts and wondered if she would be able to accomplish what she wanted in life despite her memory deficits. With this in mind, a friend told her about Roosevelt Warm Springs and the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency.

After investigating the many aspects of the Vocational Rehabilitation program, Laura made her first appointment with Dr. William McIntosh, a veteran neuropsychologist at Roosevelt Warm Springs Vocational Rehabilitation Campus in Warm Springs. After 13 hours of neuropsychological testing, Laura was diagnosed with slowed rapid recall. Dr. McIntosh provided a variety of intellectual tools to compensate for the memory recall issues in her college classes, on the job and in her life. She used her new tools to finish college and advocate for her admission to graduate school where she is currently maintaining an "A" average in her studies. In December 2014, she was received into Chi Sigma Iota, the international counseling academic and professional honor society. She has just six courses, two internships and a practicum left before she finishes her master's degree in counseling and psychology from Troy State University.

"I did not find the strength, the courage or the confidence to move forward with my goals and aspirations until I talked to Dr. McIntosh," Laura said. "All of my interactions with him have been game changers. Without him, I would not have even tried."

"Staying with things and not giving up has been the key to Laura's success," Dr. McIntosh said. "We identified her strengths and weaknesses, and we also explored her emotional reactions to stress and gave her tools to cope."

According to Dr. McIntosh, a neuropsychological evaluation can benefit many types of vocational rehabilitation clients. "Anyone with a known or suspected brain injury or neurological illness can benefit from a neuropsychological exam," he said.

RWS Student Continued

After the initial evaluation, Dr. McIntosh offers continuing support to clients as they seek to complete their education or pursue employment. "I have spent many hours helping individuals get the accommodations they need," he said. "An evaluation like we provide at Roosevelt Warm Springs Vocational Rehabilitation Campus helps make a strong case with employers and service providers."

Semi-retired, Dr. McIntosh sees clients one day a week at Roosevelt Warm Springs, and his services are available without charge to Vocational Rehabilitation clients referred to him by field counselors anywhere in the state of Georgia.

In addition to information about her condition, Dr. McIntosh also referred Laura to the VR office in Columbus, which has provided her with additional memory adaptations and job opportunities.

Laura, now 33, has fought hard for her success. In addition to her studies, she currently works full time as an information specialist at the Georgia Visitor's Information Center in Columbus. She also works part time as a mental health technician at the Bradley Center in Columbus.

Once she has her counseling degree, she plans to devote her time and efforts to advocating for people with disabilities.

From a rough beginning, she has grown to be a confident woman who expects to make a difference in the world.

She knows she can be an excellent advocate for people with disabilities because "I'm equal to them," she said. "I know what it is like. I have been there."



BEP Happenings

The Business Enterprise Program is excited to welcome Sheena Shelby as its newest blind vendor licensee candidate. After a successful interview, Sheena was awarded the vendor manager position at the Trinity Washington Building snack bar located on Capital Hill. She will also manage vending route at a Department of Driver Services (DDS) center. This recent award removes one more individual from the BEP list of trained

licensee's with no assigned facility and starts Sheena's 6-month process of provisional vendor management status. Congratulations, Sheena!

The BEP has recently enhanced the sales of the vendor manager assigned to the 18th floor café of the Summit Building in Atlanta by installing a state of the art salad bar. The addition of the snack bar has greatly enhanced sales of the facility.

BEP Opens Mini Mart at DAS

On June 29, the Business Enterprise Program opened its third self service micro market at our sister agency, Disability Adjudication Services (DAS) located in Stone Mountain. BEP sponsored a grand opening celebration beginning to introduce the new food service concept to DAS staff. Free money was loaded onto DAS employee key cards to encourage employee participation. The micro mart doesn't require an attendant as visitors pay for all merchandise via a kiosk and their personalized key fob.



Scenes from the ADA Parade



DAS Employee of the Month

This nomination was submitted by Cathy Chafin in the category of agency commitment.

I would like to nominate Nancie Morley for employee of the month. Nancie does an outstanding job managing her caseload, which includes all claim types. Her commitment to excellence is reflected in her overall performance: Processing Time: 64.3 days (Exceptional), Aged Case Percentage: 8.50% (Successful), Substantive Accuracy Rating: 100% (Exceptional), Caseload Size: 130 Cases (Successful Plus), Production: 100% (Exceptional), APAs: 61.35% (Successful Plus), Case Processing Development: No lags (Exceptional). As evidenced by her exemplary mid-point statistics, she is dedicated to providing timely, high quality disability decisions to the citizens of Georgia.



DAS Employees Honored

Congratulations to members of the DAS Quality Assurance Unit—Lisa Kagan, Vanessa Taylor, Paul Nettle, Kim Aiken and Lisa Asher—for recently receiving the Assistant Commissioner for Operations Honor Award from the Social Security Administration (SSA). David Crozier, Quality Assurance Unit Manager, wrote the nomination. This award was given for their tremendous effort during Federal Fiscal Year 2014 (FFY14) in training two hundred and twenty-five staff on how to conduct Continuing Disability Reviews (CDRs), which are an important measure in administering the disability program with accuracy and efficiency. Thanks to their dedication and hard work, DAS was able to exceed the budgeted workload of 13,390 CDRs given to us by SSA for FFY14.

Their citation reads:

In recognition of exemplary service to achieve the strategic goals of SSA to provide world class customer service while maintaining the integrity of the SSA disability programs.

SSA Assistant Commissioner Nancy Berryhill also sent them a congratulatory letter, reading in part:

"... in recognition of your extraordinary accomplishments and valuable support to public service in Fiscal Year 2014. You contributed significantly to the mission of Operations and the Agency as a whole. You should take great pride in knowing that this award goes to those employees who have demonstrated a personal commitment to excellence and who have made exceptional contributions to the mission and goals of the agency."

GVRA 2015 Shining Star Winners

GVRA recently hosted the first annual Shining Star Awards for employees. The winners are below. Also included below are pictures of the award winners who could attend the awards luncheon. Luis Narimatsu will receive the Chairman's Award at the next GVRS Board meeting.

Service Star Award Internal: Takeeya Lee; Service Star Award External: Lynn Tallant; Leadership Award: Dale Arnold; Employee of the Year Award: Virginia "Gigi" Taylor; Overcoming Obstacles Award: Cindy White and Darla Guiden; Innovation Award: Lee Brinkley Bryan and Rajaunnda "Raj" Gandy; Chairman's Award: Luis Narimatsu.



Pictured from top left and clockwise: Rajaunnda "Raj" Gandy, Takeeya Lee, Gigi Taylor, Lynn Tallant, Lee Brinkley Bryan and Dale Arnold, all winners of the first annual GVRA Shining Star Awards. If you see any of these folks, make sure to congratulate them and thank them for their hard work and dedication to service.

For a full list of all those nominated or to make a suggestion for next year's awards, please email Communications Manager John Peyton Boan at john.boan@gvra.ga.gov or call (404) 232-1998.

From Client to Employee

Ravi W. applied for VR services in July 2014 for assistance in getting employment. He said that he was frustrated because he felt like the loss of his arm was the reason that he was not getting hired. Ravi is an extremely bright and personable man who had an excellent work history and excellent education. Not only did he have a Master's degree in mechanical engineering, but he really was motivated to go back to work in the engineering field.

Ravi had been in an industrial accident in 1991, and his right arm was amputated below the elbow. He also had sustained injuries to his other arm, shoulder and hand from the same accident. Ravi had the prosthetic device that he had gotten as a result of that accident but it was in disrepair and no longer useful. He would need to have a new prosthesis to be able to do most production engineering jobs that he was interested in applying for.

VRC tried to get his discharge diagnoses from the hospital where he was treated in Alabama, but this



hospital had reported that no records could be found. Vocational Rehabilitation sent him to a local orthopedic specialist to obtain an evaluation as to medical stability with his injured arm and to request a prescription for a prosthetic.

Next, Ravi was referred to Assistive Work Technology services for help in getting the correct occupational prosthetic for his individual needs. Ravi chose his own provider; Walker Orthotics, who fit him with a prosthetic device that was appropriate for him with assistance from Assistive Work Technologist Melissa Freeman and an outsourced

occupational therapist, provided from Redmond Hospital.

In order for Ravi to return to work as an engineer, he would be required to turn knobs, pull levers and manipulate wires and other small parts, all which require fine motor movement, and a myoelectric prosthetic was recommended. This would be very expensive, and the VRC had to use the high cost justification process, which was approved.

A myoelectric prosthetic arm uses electronic sensors to detect minute muscle, nerve and brain activity. It then translates this muscle activity (as triggered by the user) into information that its electric motors use to control the artificial limb's movements. This is a perfect example of how the correct prosthetic device would be able to allow Ravi to return to work and be able to sign his name and use fine motor movements as an engineer, without having major accommodations in the workplace.

Reports were in. A work plan was signed, and Ravi received his prosthetic arm in January 2015. He had to have a couple appointments for proper fitting and he was referred to the Business Relations department for job placement assistance.

Client to Employee Continued

It turns out that VR had an open position for a rehabilitation engineer in the Atlanta metro area.

Ravi followed up on this type of engineering job and found that it had everything that he could have wanted in a work position. He will need a few assistive devices/technology to accommodate the limited grip with his left hand to enable him to work effectively and efficiently. The job skills required the engineering that he was trained on, and allowed him to be able to assist other individuals with disabilities with his personal knowledge and skills. He applied for the job and several months later, he was hired by VR.

Ravi began his new job on June 1, 2015. This is the result of teamwork and on-going collective effort between Rajesh Pagadala (AWT), Melissa Freeman (AWT), Traci Brown (CRC), Deidra Wells (CA), Paul Ray (RUM) and Norris Curtis (CRC) from the Rome office and David Baggett from Walker Orthotics.

DBHDD Partnership

After nearly a year of talks, GVRA recently entered into part one of a large-scale partnership with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities.

According to the agreement, DBHDD will contribute funds out of their Fiscal Year 2016 budget to provide GVRA with 14 new certified rehabilitation counselor (CRC) positions to specifically address the needs of clients with severe and persistent mental illnesses. The goal is for those new employees to help move 720 clients from day programs to supported employment over the next 12 months.



DBHDD

“This is a really big deal,” said GVRA Executive Director Greg Schmiege. “It’s been awhile coming, but it’s great news. I want to thank the folks at DBHDD for all that they’ve done and continue to do to help us in our collective mission.”

The second agreement, which should be finalized any day now, operates in much the same manner as the first. DBHDD will provide funding to go towards 12 new CRC positions, who will be tasked with focusing largely on individuals with developmental disabilities. The agreement will also include funds for several benefits navigators and a project coordinator. It is aimed at moving between 30 and 120 individuals with developmental disabilities from day programs to supported employment in the coming year.

“Partnerships make what we do that much easier,” Schmiege said. “And we’ll continue to explore ways in which we can work with other state agencies to better serve the citizens of Georgia.”