



Greg's Greetings

Approaching the checkered flag ...

We are less than a month away from the end of the state fiscal year, 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. I can't honestly say that we will win the race this year, but I can say that we are gaining ground.

Unlike most races, however, our's doesn't end with this lap. We will cross the finish line for this fiscal year, and immediately head into turn one for next year's race. Most of us won't even see the checkered flag, we will simply show up for work the next day and the race is 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 coming 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 final lap, I thank you for all the hard work that you did this 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 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.

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.

GIB's Bainbridge and Griffin plants are always open to partner with VR to provide training opportunities for clients needing work experience.



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 you where you needed to go. However at the age of 9, tragedy struck and Laura was diagnosed with a brain tumor.

The brain tumor, a benign ganglioglioma growing in her left temporal lobe, caused severe seizures. Laura and her family eventually consented to a dangerous surgical removal of the tumor although the side effects to this type of surgery could leave 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 for Laura was a struggle, 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 correct path toward her high school diploma. In 2001, Laura reached her first goal of receiving 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, Ms. Book still suffered from painful self-doubts and wondered if she would be able to accomplish more in life despite her memory deficits. With this in mind, a friend told her about Roosevelt Warm Springs and the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

After investigating all the many aspects of the Vocational Rehabilitation program, Ms. Book made her first appointment with Dr. William McIntosh, a veteran neuropsychologist at Roosevelt Warm Springs Vocational Rehabilitation Campus in Warm Springs, Georgia. After 13 hours of neuropsychological testing, Ms. Book had a primary diagnosis of 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," or "Dr. Mac," as she called him fondly. "All of my interactions with him have been game changers. Without him, I would not have even tried," commented Book.

"Staying with things and not giving up has been the key to Laura's success," Dr. McIntosh said. "We identified her strengths and weaknesses," he added, "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

"So can clients with Attention Deficient Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or any type of psychological disorder not adequately diagnosed."

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 Ms. Book to the vocational rehabilitation office in Columbus that has provided her with additional memory adaptations and job opportunities.

Ms. Book, 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."



RWS Employees Continued

