

# The Session In Review

**GVRA** 

**April 2015**





# Greg's Greetings

Each year, the state of Georgia holds a legislative session that by law must meet 40 days. The “session” usually begins in early January each year, and then it usually ends sometime in early April. The required 40 days are not necessarily consecutive, which is why the session doesn’t end until sometime in late March or early April.

This is the one time each calendar year that all state representatives and state senators meet to discuss the business of the state. The one item that is required to be accomplished during the session is the approval of the state budget. Each year the Governor proposes a budget for the state for the current year (which is called the amended budget) and the coming year. Then both the House and the Senate meet, review, hold hearings, change and conference together to pass a final budget for the Governor’s signature, which then becomes law.

So what about this year? Well, things are changing, and things are changing for the better. As many of you know, Kevin Harris, who is our Director of External Affairs, spends every day at the Capitol during the session.

As such, Kevin really has a good sense of what’s happening – you might say he has the “pulse” of the state legislature. And then, I have the privilege of presenting our agency budget to the respective house and senate

appropriations sub-committees, as well as the occasional request to meet with a state representative or senator.

Over the past two and a half years, our goal has been to educate all of our state legislators about what we do, what you do and more importantly, the value of what you do for Georgians with disabilities. According to Kevin, there was notably more awareness of who we are and what we do during this session than in the past. Also, due to some tremendous efforts to speak on our behalf by many of our providers, the House added \$900,000 in state funds to the VR Program (which will allow us to match that with about \$3.3 million in federal funds). This additional funding was kept in by the Senate and made it through the conference committee and is currently in the final state budget for the next fiscal year beginning July 1, 2015. All of this is good news for GVRA.

Even though the session is now adjourned for this year, our legislative work does not end. Kevin, myself and others will now take our education about what we do on the road to meet with individual legislators across the state. Our goal is simple: to make our state legislators understand the importance of putting people with disabilities to work.

You all work so hard to do that every day, and our job, more specifically my job, is to help support you by hopefully getting you more resources to do your job to serve our citizens. I hope this gives you a little insight into how the system works.

Thank you for what you do.

# What the Session Meant for Us

The 2015 session of the Georgia General Assembly has come and gone, and it was a good year for GVRA, its respective divisions and most importantly, our clients. As an agency, this was the third year that we have had a presence at the Capitol. During that time, there has been a significant increase in the awareness of our programs and the clients we serve. In previous years, the GVRA/110 funds budgets (BEP, RWS, CS and VR budgets) have been stagnant or even receded.

This year, nine items occurred that directly impact our agency or its respective divisions: the 2015 supplemental budget, the 2016 budget, one proclamation by the Governor, one House Resolution, one Senate Resolution, HR 642, transfer of the RWS hospitals to GRU in the Georgia code, modification of the conveyance of the hospitals and the correction/leasing of the RWS Golf Course.

In the 2016 budget as presented, Governor Deal added \$625,091 dollars to GVRA, and the 110 programs in total. Once the process initiated, the House and Senate added an additional \$900,000 to the VR (Field Services) component. A number of agency allies and partners are to be commended for their efforts, but particularly many of our CRPs went above and beyond to ensure that additional funding was available to serve Georgians with disabilities. While many of the elected officials were involved in the ultimate ability to serve more people, particular credit for responding to the needs should be given to Reps. Katie Dempsey and Chairman

Terry England, Chairmen Renee Untermann and Jack Hill, and Governor Nathan Deal.

Another exciting accomplishment was HR 642, a House task force to study the possibilities of an Employment First initiative in Georgia. Along with the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities, D'Arcy Robb coordinated the efforts to acknowledge the success of post-secondary inclusion and the need for an Employment First Policy in Georgia. On the legislative side, Rep. Katie Dempsey was a champion by creating a House Study Committee on Postsecondary Education and Employment Options for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. The task force will be formed and has been charged with creating a report by December 31, 2015.

Legislatively, a number of bills that impact our agency or its respective divisions were monitored throughout the session. There were a number of bills that passed that will impact our agency and clients ranging from their education, health care, transportation and economic opportunities.

On behalf of the GVRA External Affairs team, it is a pleasure to serve this agency and its respective divisions. Opportunities are increasing for our agency, and it is an exciting time to be part of an organization that can truly make a difference in real lives.

External Affairs Director Kevin Harris



Pictured from left: GRA members Lee Davis, Jeff Allen, Dana Skelton-Sanders and Ruby Kaspers met with legislators at the GRA Legislative Day at the Capitol several weeks ago. The event was a great success, and our partners were very instrumental at helping educate legislators about what GVRA does and where it's going in the coming weeks, months and years.

# Exploration Event at RWS

The process of learning about career opportunities is one of the many services that are offered to people with disabilities at the Roosevelt Warm Springs (RWS) Vocational Rehabilitation Campus.

On March 17th, current Roosevelt Warm Springs vocational rehabilitation students attended an “Exploration Event” held in Georgia Hall. The vocational students had an opportunity to learn about the many career options offered through the career and technical education training programs available at the rehabilitation center.

Programs represented at the event included business and information technology, certified nursing assistant/certified home health aide, computer information systems, food services, heavy equipment operation, horticulture and industrial housekeeping. Students and the RWS staff alike browsed and experienced the interactive displays and asked the instructors specific program questions. Attendees also explored the recent technological advances in the RWS driver education program that allow the instructors to evaluate and train students with state-of-the-art computer simulation.

RWS program philosophy supports students in the development of self-determination and self-advocacy. Learning opportunities are offered through courses, student led progress meetings and participation in student organizations. Leadership is also emphasized as part of student development in a variety of campus opportunities and community activities. Our program philosophy is the foundation of all programs developed at Warm Springs that

prepare students for successful transition to competitive employment, independence and life-long citizenship.

Before long, students at Roosevelt Warm Springs will have even more career options to explore. The opening of a new computer visualization lab this summer will allow students to train and practice for careers in auto body painting, electrical wiring, carpentry, welding and robotics. Students will also have an opportunity to study and practice 3D printing and design.

If you have any questions about any of the Career and Technical Education training programs at RWS, please contact Audrey Fuller, RWS Director of Career and Technical Education at 706-655-5054 or [Audrey.Fuller@gvra.ga.gov](mailto:Audrey.Fuller@gvra.ga.gov).



Pictured above: RWS Student Sterling Williams makes a cutting for propagation from a coleus during the career exploration event. Making cuttings is just one of many skills taught by the RWS horticulture program. Williams has completed the program and is now on work site training at Callaway Gardens.

# Buy a GVRA Shirt from GIB

Anyone interested in buying a polo or oxford shirt with the GVRA or its program logos can do so through Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB) and help support the agency at the same time.

Men's short sleeve polo shirts are available in the following colors: white, gold, maroon, black, iron grey, true royal blue

Women's short sleeve polo shirts are available in the following colors: white, gold, maroon, black, iron grey, true royal blue and light pink.

Men's and women's long sleeve polo shirts are available in the following colors; white, black and maroon

Prices start at \$25. For full pricing, please email the address below. Nominal shipping charges are additional.

Please email [Customer\\_Service@gvra.ga.gov](mailto:Customer_Service@gvra.ga.gov). Credit Card required.

It's a great opportunity to support GIB and to add a few comfy polos to your wardrobe before the summer months roll around.



## BEP Updates

The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) welcomed with lots of excitement its newest staff member on March 1. Joshua "Josh" Lingerfelt will work out of the Tucker main office and will be tasked with working on the program's first franchise. Josh will be supervised by Teresa Eggleston, program manager for North Georgia. Welcome Josh!

Also, BEP is very proud to announce the new L & S dining facility located on Sand Hill at Fort Benning Army post in Columbus. The opening of this dining facility created 75 jobs and can feed 1,300 at one time. Licensed blind vendor Michel Lee is the contract manager of this location.



# DAS Employee of the Month

*The nomination of Rhonda Pyle for the DAS April 2015 employee of the month was submitted by Mary Quarles in the category of agency commitment:*

A great DAS employee is not merely an adjudicator who performs well but is also one who has a great work ethic and desire to serve his/her customers well. Rhonda Pyle embodies all of these characteristics. Not only does her statistical performance consistently exceptional, but she also has a "can-do" attitude and arrives at the office prepared to do her very best every day. When asked to take on an extra task or two, Rhonda never says no. Instead, she steps up to the plate, rearranges her usual schedule and makes it happen. She displays a high level of commitment to serving SSA and DAS through first-rate customer service, a strong work ethic and the pursuit of excellence.

It is with great pleasure and pride that I nominate Rhonda Pyle for employee of the month.



From left are Mary Quarles, Rhonda Pyle and Lynne Powell, manger of the branch office.

# VR Director Ed James

Greetings everyone and happy spring. I want to share an email I received in late March. I can say thank you for all you do, however it is GREAT to hear it directly from those we serve.

Good morning Mr. James,

I am an advocate for my niece Ashley who has received excellent GVRA services for the past four years. Ashley has ADD and was told throughout her early years by teachers and even her principal that she would never make it in college. I worked with her throughout her high school years. She graduated with honors with a 3.9 GPA, but still her high school counselor discouraged her from applying to schools like UGA and GCSU. She ended up attending GCSU, and her first semester was rough. I reached out and a colleague told me about GVRA. Her high school had not mentioned your services even though she had been on a 504 plan since the fourth grade.

The GVRA Gainesville office and Ashley's rehabilitation counselor there, Cathy Arrington, were great. They helped us setup services with GCSU's disability services. Ashley excelled after that and graduated with a BS in biology last December. Ashley recently moved to the Tucker area with me to look for employment and again GVRA has been there for her. Cheryl Gosier from the GVRA Tucker unit contacted me today to help arrange the transfer of Ashley's case from Gainesville to the Tucker unit. It has been very difficult for Ashley to find any kind of work. She has sent out hundreds of applications and even randomly goes to three to four business each day in person to fill out applications. Now that GVRA is helping, I feel like something will come along.

Having worked for DBHDD, DOL, DOAS, and DHR for 25 years, I know how we as state employees always hear about the problems and complaints. I wanted to take a moment to let you know that your agency has exceeded my expectations, and you have a very dedicated staff. In a world where people with disabilities constantly face closed doors and discrimination, it is nice to see that at least one state agency is on their side. Thank you for all you do, and we really appreciate it!

Sincerely,  
Sam Wood

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).

# Big Success at Little Caesars

*This story was reprinted with permission from The Douglas Enterprise.*

## Local Restaurant Proves Vocational Rehabilitation Works

Ed Smith

Entering the job market for any hopeful employee can be a stressful task but with the help of Georgia's Vocational Rehabilitation Agency one local restaurant is helping citizens with physical and mental disabilities transition into successful careers with ease.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Agency teamed up with Little Caesar's Restaurant several months ago in order to provide employment for job seekers with disabilities. The agency provides participants with training, job preparation, resume design, college/technical education, transportation assistance, child-care assistance and other tools to ensure successful job placement.

"This program has been tremendously beneficial to our company," commented Little Caesar's of Douglas Manager Benjamin Powell. "Currently we have two individuals on our staff that work with this program and we could not be happier with their performance and what they bring to our company. This program is very community oriented and allows us to support job growth and lower unemployment rates to each community we utilize this program in. We are fully committed to doing what we can to make our communities better and this program is a fantastic way for us to be able to achieve that goal." For the past several months, Douglas native Amber Selph has been

working hard to prove that she is a valuable asset to the Little Caesar's company. "I've always struggled to find an employer who would give me an opportunity due to my disabilities," stated Selph. "Thanks to this program I now have a job that I absolutely love. Every morning I wake up smiling as I get ready for work and each day brings new excitement as I get to interact with the public, which is always fun because I get to laugh and smile with our customers. I'm so thankful Benjamin gave me a chance at this job."

Another Douglas native, Billy Rhoten, also began working at Little Caesar's this past week through the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Both Rhoten and Selph are provided with counselors who remain hands-on throughout their employment to assist them with any problems that may arise. "It's incredibly comforting to know that if I need to talk to someone or get advice on how to improve from someone outside of work I can call my counselor anytime and she always has time to work with me," added Selph.

Little Caesar's of Douglas will be getting a new general manager, Kayla Phillips, this month who stated that she will continue to utilize the Vocational Rehabilitation Agency due to the undeniable success rate the company has experienced so far. Benjamin Powell will be taking over a restaurant in Statesboro, Georgia, at the end of this month. "I will definitely be taking this program to the Statesboro location as well," stated Powell.

For additional information regarding the Vocational Rehabilitation Agency and the programs and services they offer, visit [www.vocrehabga.org](http://www.vocrehabga.org) or call 1-866-489-0001.