

Charles Mason



Charles Mason – VR client, Region 3B (Unit 6)

Twenty-seven years ago, **Charles Mason** was born 2 ½ months premature, and weighed in at 3 ½ pounds. He spent his first few weeks in an incubator where the oxygen that kept him alive also damaged his retinas, causing him to be visually impaired. He has diagnosed with retinopathy of prematurity.

On his birthday exactly twenty-five years later, he received word from his employer, AirTran Airways, that he'd been promoted to a Customer Care Specialist. And about two years after that, Charles earned the prestigious **2009 Excellence Award** from AirTran, an honor given to only 47 of over 8,600 employees.

Charles' employment experience with AirTran Airways began in early 2007 when his VR counselor referred him to the Assistive Work Technology unit in College Park as an applicant for a Reservations Agent position.

With assistance from Rehabilitation Employment Specialist Bess Garrett, Charles was screened for both technical and "people" skills, and sent on to AirTran where he was interviewed, hired, and trained. His trainer at AirTran, Tracy Stepney, must have enjoyed training and working with Charles and other blind and visually impaired new hires, because she had earlier left full-time employment with AirTran to join the AWT team as a Rehabilitation Technologist.

Charles was provided a copy of the MAGic screen magnification program to enable him to read computer screen reservation and customer information, and a Fusion portable video magnifier for dealing with printed material. Says Charles, "The assistive technology is definitely helpful. I don't like to have to ask others for favors. It's nice to be independent."

An Atlanta native, Charles attended The Westminster Schools, and then Furman University, with VR sponsorship, where he graduated in 2006 with a degree in Communication Studies. Upon graduation, he worked for a year at Centennial Place YMCA where he counseled children, until joining the AirTran Crew.

Charles balances his work at AirTran with his love of the theater – not as an audience member, but rather as an actor. He recently played the role of Henry, a homeless man coming into a wealthy home, in the play "Veranda," a comedic farce which played at the Ansley Park Playhouse during a five month run. It should be noted that Charles' role was that of a sighted man, not a blind man, and he pulled it off well-enough that he was featured in an Atlanta Journal Constitution entertainment article.

When asked about his still young career at AirTran Airways, Charles says, "I see myself always wanting to move upward and improve myself – whether at AirTran or in acting."

Charles is a great example of how valuable and upwardly mobile VR clients can be in an organization if they are given an opportunity and take advantage of it.