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GOVERNOR'S COMMITTEE ON THE
EMPLOYMENT OF
PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

ABILITIES

Promoting the employment of Vermont citizens of all abilities

July 2011 - Volume 5, Issue 2

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Dear Friends ~What Can YOU Do?



Fred Jones,
GCEPD Chair

On behalf of the Governor's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities, I would like to welcome you to the latest issue of "Abilities".

With this issue we are asking you to actively engage with us. Do you know a business or individual deserving of special recognition? Please send them our way by nominating them for a Governor's Award.

Might you or a colleague or friend be interesting in serving on the GCEPD? Please contact us or print out and submit a membership application.

Lastly, we invite you to refresh your understanding of how to communicate with - and about - a person with a disability, especially in the workplace. This important step can help one to shift from worrying about the "right" way to interact to focusing instead on the abilities and talents an individual brings to the workplace.

Thanks for reading on - and please feel free to share!



Best regards,

Fred Jones, Chair

Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities

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What's on your Mind?

Inviting Nominations for the 2011 Governor's Awards

We are currently seeking nominations for the 2011 Governor's Awards. Initiated in 1989, the Governor's Awards are presented to individuals, businesses, media or municipalities that have made significant contributions to the employment of people with disabilities. To date over 70 Vermont businesses and individuals have been honored.

The 2011 awards will recognize the activities or accomplishments of an individual, business, organization or municipality during the period of January 2010 through July 2011. They will be handed out at the Creative Workforce Solutions Employment Institute III, on September 23, 2011 at the Sheraton Hotel Conference Center in Burlington.

The nomination deadline is August 26, 2011.

Anyone may submit a nomination; indeed, we welcome nominations from individuals, service providers, employers, employees, parents, community members and others. This is a wonderful opportunity to acknowledge the unsung individuals and businesses in Vermont whose practices ultimately support the goal of barrier-free employment for all.

The Governor's Awards are given in three different categories:

The Employment /

Accommodation Award is for an employer who reflects the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act in their employment practices, including but not limited to:

a) The provision of equal access in the application and interview process so that physical and cognitive disabilities are accommodated;

b) The delivery of training that responds to individual learning needs and styles;

c) The implementation of creative programs and solutions with a "think outside the box" mentality in order to address the unique employment needs and challenges of employees with disabilities;

d) The modification of work stations, work tasks, etc. to accommodate employees to ensure professional success;

e) The use of available programs and/or other recruitment practices that cast a wide net for including people with disabilities in the applicant pool.



Some of the 2008 Governor's Awards winners

The Design / Accessibility Award is for the architect, contractor, business, municipality, recreational facility or entity that has created innovative and creative solutions for accessible structures, buildings or services or provided accommodations to create equal and aesthetic access.

The Media / Public Education Award recognizes an individual or member of the media: a) who has brought attention to disability issues and stories, using sensitive and nondiscriminatory language to depict people with disabilities and to reflect the worth of the person(s) being written about; and/or b) who has promoted or showcased a person overcoming barriers in an inspiring way.

More information about the awards and a list of previous winners can be found [here](#) on our website.

If you would like to submit a nomination, please click below to get started. We look forward to hearing from you. Remember, the nomination deadline is August 26, 2011.

[click here for a nomination form](#)

We Invite you to Join the GCEPD!



GCEPD members Betty Nuovo, George Nostrand, April Tuck, Beth Stanuch

The GCEPD is currently recruiting new members - won't you join us in our efforts? In particular we are seeking: 1) individuals with a disability or representing a disability community; 2) representatives of business, industry or nonprofits; and 3) individuals who provide services to people with disabilities.

Here is some background information as you consider potential membership:

The GCEPD is a permanent, standing committee of the Governor, established by the state legislature in the 1960s. Our mission is to promote equal employment for all citizens of Vermont by: (1) advising the Governor on current issues affecting the employment of people with disabilities, and (2) forming partnerships between business, government and people with disabilities. The GCEPD's vision is "Barrier Free Employment for All Vermonters".

Membership of the GCEPD is comprised of 21 people. Four members are mandated by the legislature to represent Vocational Rehabilitation, the Vermont Department of Labor, the Veterans Administration, and Veterans Employment. The remaining members are divided rather equally among the three different groups referenced above.

Members are appointed to a three year term and they may serve two complete, three-year terms. They may also serve out the remaining term of any member they may be appointed to replace. There is an application process which culminates in the consideration of applications and final appointment by Governor Shumlin.

The GCEPD meets on the second Tuesday of every other month from 10 a.m. to noon, with most meetings taking place in Waterbury. Members always have the option to participate via telephone if necessary. Our next meetings are in August, October, and December of 2011. Individuals considering membership must be able to attend the meetings.

If you are interesting in applying for membership or in learning more about the GCEPD and our current activities, please contact GCEPD Executive Coordinator Melita DeBellis at melita@gcepd.org or call 802-434-6600.

On a related note, we wish to publicly recognize long-time member Betty Nuovo for her service to the GCEPD representing the Department of Labor. A member for over 15 years, Betty's devotion and service to the Committee, and more importantly to the individuals we seek to support, have been remarkable and invaluable. She will be missed and we wish her well.



GCEPD Chair Fred Jones
with Betty Nuovo

What Can YOU Do?

Effective communications with and about a person with a disability

The Campaign for Disability Employment (CDE), a newly-formed collaborative of leading disability and business organizations, has launched "*What Can YOU Do?*", a national effort designed to promote the hiring, retention and advancement of people with disabilities and dispel negative stereotypes about disability and employment.

This public outreach campaign strives to show employers that it pays to foster an inclusive and flexible work culture that considers the needs of all employees - including employees with disabilities.

Every day, people with disabilities can and do add value to America's workplaces. However, in both good economic times and bad, people with disabilities have far fewer job opportunities than the general population. What can YOU do to change that? CDE encourages employers and others to recognize the value and talent that people with disabilities bring to the workplace, as well as the dividend to be realized by fully including people with disabilities - because at work, it's what people can do that matters.

Employers have much to gain by having a workplace that is open to everyone. Such universal thinking not only helps recruit skilled employees, but also enhances corporate continuity efforts by helping employers retain the talents of an aging workforce. And when it comes to doing business, being inclusive of people with disabilities - in recruitment, retention and advancement - can offer companies a competitive edge. People with disabilities are known to be experienced problem solvers with a proven ability to adapt. What's more, they mirror an important and

increasingly expanding customer base.

It's easy for employers, and others, to participate in the *What Can YOU Do?* Campaign and drive positive change. For example, the Campaign's Web site, www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org, offers users the chance to learn, engage in disability employment efforts and share their employment experiences. The site also features grassroots tools and tangible ideas for supporting the Campaign's goals.

So, what can you do? We invite you to shift from a focus on the "disability" to a focus on ability. In the workplace, we look for good workers, and a good worker is a good worker. Yet apprehension about how to communicate with and about a person who also happens to have a disability can make it difficult to shift away from thoughts about the disability. Therefore, a good place to start is to learn more about how to have easy and effective communications, especially in the workplace.

It is natural to be concerned about the "right" way to have such communications and that concern may at times pose an unconscious barrier to employing a person with a disability. Therefore, we invite you to consider the following valuable advice from the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy:

Effective Interaction: Communicating With and About People with Disabilities in the Workplace

"As children, we are curious - pointing to anything unfamiliar and asking questions. We have few, if any, inhibitions. As adults, we learn to censor our queries, feeling uncomfortable with anything unfamiliar. This is true when we are faced with new technologies. It is true when we are faced with tackling new projects for which we may not feel prepared. It is often true when we meet people who speak a different language or come from a different culture.

It is human nature and not unusual, therefore, to be concerned about interactions with people who use wheelchairs, who are blind, who are deaf, or whom we find difficult to understand. We may be concerned that we will say the wrong thing, ask an inappropriate question, or unintentionally offend. We do not want to appear uninformed or insensitive.

Tips for Speaking or Writing about People with Disabilities

A key to any effective communication is to focus on the communication itself - what information needs to be transmitted and how best to transmit it. Positive language empowers. When writing or speaking about people with disabilities, it is important to put the person first - to focus on the person, not the disability. Group designations, such as "the blind," "the deaf" or "the disabled" are not empowering. It is important to use words that reflect individuality, equality or dignity - the person who is blind, the child who is deaf, the individual with a disability, for example.

Following are examples of appropriate and inappropriate phrases to describe persons with disabilities.

Positive Phrases:

1. Person with an intellectual, cognitive, developmental disability
2. Person who is blind or visually impaired
3. Person with a disability
4. Person who is deaf or hard of hearing
5. Person with multiple sclerosis
6. Person with cerebral palsy
7. Person with epilepsy or a seizure disorder
8. Person who has muscular dystrophy
9. Person who uses a wheelchair; wheelchair user
10. Person who is unable to speak, person who uses synthetic speech
11. Person with a psychiatric disability
12. Person with a physical disability, person who is physically disabled
13. Person who is successful, productive

Negative Phrases:

1. The retarded; mentally retarded
2. The blind
3. The disabled; handicapped
4. The deaf; deaf and dumb
5. Someone afflicted by MS
6. A CP victim
7. An epileptic; person with fits
8. Someone stricken by MD
9. Person confined, bound or restricted to a wheelchair
10. A mute
11. A crazy person
12. Person who is crippled, lame or deformed
13. Person who has overcome his/her disability; person who is courageous

Tips for Interacting with People with Disabilities

Appropriate etiquette when interacting with people with disabilities is based primarily on respect and courtesy. Below are a few tips to help you communicate effectively.

* When speaking with a person with a disability, talk directly to the person, not his or her companion. This applies whether the person has a mobility impairment, a speech impairment, a cognitive impairment, is blind or deaf and uses an interpreter.

* Extend common courtesies to people with disabilities. Extend your hand to shake hands or hand over business cards. If the individual cannot shake your hand or grasp the card, he or she will tell you, and direct where you may place the card.

* If the person has a speech impairment and you are having difficulty understanding what he or she is saying, ask the individual to repeat, rather than pretending to

understand. Listen carefully, and repeat back what you think you heard to ensure effective communication.

* If you believe that an individual with a disability needs assistance, go ahead and offer the assistance - but wait for your offer to be accepted before you try to help.

* If you are interviewing a job candidate with a disability, listen to what the individual has to offer. Do not make assumptions about what that person can or cannot do.

* If you are speaking to a person who is blind, be sure to identify yourself at the beginning of the conversation and announce when you are leaving. Don't be afraid to use common expressions that refer to sight, such as, "See you later."

* If you wish to get the attention of a person who is deaf, tap the person gently on the shoulder or arm. Look directly at the person, and speak clearly in a normal tone of voice. Keep your hands away from your face, and use short, simple sentences. If the person uses a sign language interpreter, speak directly to the person, not to the interpreter.

* If you encounter an individual with a service animal, such as a dog, please do not touch or distract the animal. Service animals are working, and it breaks their training to interact with others when they are on duty. When the animal is not working, some owners may allow interaction.

* If you are having a conversation with a person who uses a wheelchair, if at all possible put yourself at the person's eye level. Never lean on or touch a person's wheelchair or any other assistive device. A person's assistive device is part of the person's personal space, and it is jarring or disturbing for anyone to have his or personal space invaded.

* If you are speaking with an individual with a cognitive disability, you may need to repeat or rephrase what you say. If you are giving instructions on how to perform a task, you may also need to give the instructions in writing.

Relax. Whether conducting an interview or day-to-day workplace communications, focus on the subject matter and not on disability related issues. Treat the individual with the same respect and courtesy that you extend to all job candidates and employees. Any initial concerns will quickly disappear as you focus on effective communications.

References

"Guidelines for Reporting and Writing About People with Disabilities," produced by the Research and Training Center on Independent Living, University of Kansas.

"Ten Commandments of Etiquette for Communicating with People with Disabilities," October 1995, National Center for Access Unlimited, Chicago, IL.

The above list of resources is not meant to be exhaustive. Any listing of

non-governmental resources in this fact sheet should not be construed as an endorsement of the entities, their services or products by the Office of Disability Employment Policy or the U.S. Department of Labor.

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The Campaign for Disability Employment is a collaborative effort between the:

- American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD);
- National Business and Disability Council (NBDC);
- National Council of La Raza (NCLR);
- National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC);
- Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM);
- Special Olympics (SO); and the
- U.S. Business Leadership Network (USBLN).
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The Campaign is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), receives technical assistance from the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) and is supported by the Disability Policy Research Center (DPRC) at West Virginia University.

For more information, visit www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org.

Unveiling our New Look!

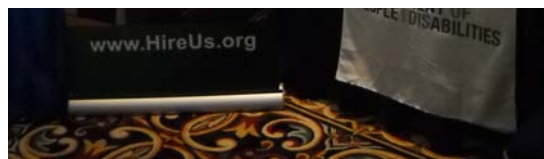
The mission of the GCEPD is to promote the barrier-free employment of Vermonters of all abilities. We do this in a variety of ways. We provide resource information and links to employment services; educational presentations; practical advice and real life solutions via our electronic newsletter and website; and direct communication to the office of the Governor regarding current issues affecting the employment of persons with disabilities.

Much of our focus is education and outreach, and one of our key outlets for this activity is the trade show. Therefore, we were very proud to introduce the new look of our trade show booth display, as well as our



new logo, at the May 2011 Business and Industry Expo.

Take a look for yourself!



MORE ON Submitting a Nomination for the Governor's Awards

Please use the following form to submit your nominations for the Governor's Awards. You may also print this form out from this [link](#) on our website.

If you have any questions, please contact Melita DeBellis at melita@gcepd.org or call 802-434-6600.

2011 GOVERNOR'S AWARDS NOMINATION FORM

Thank you for expressing interest in the 2011 Governor's Awards. Please provide us with the information requested below as well as the nominee's record of current and past activities and mail or fax to:

GCEPD, P.O. Box 748, Richmond, VT 05477.

What's On Your Mind?

We welcome your Feedback!

What's on your mind? How do you like this newsletter? Is there something missing you'd like to read about? How else can we be of service to you?

Please share your ideas and feedback with us by emailing Melita DeBellis, Executive Coordinator, at melita@gcepd.org.

Thanks!

Thanks for reading this issue of "Abilities". We welcome your comments, feedback, and suggestions for future issues. Copies of past issues may be found on our website - www.hireus.org, or in the [Constant Contact archives](#).

Melita DeBellis,

Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities
melita@gcepd.org; 802-434-6600; www.hireus.org

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