



MEDIA RELEASE

Jobs are Alaska's Future



ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
& WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
Commissioner Click Bishop

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For more information, contact Velja Elstad, a program specialist with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, at (907) 465-6932.

Governor's Committee Announces Award Recipients

JUNEAU – The Governor's Committee on Employment and Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities held its annual awards ceremony Sept. 25 in Anchorage to honor individuals, employers and organizations that have helped advance the employment of people with disabilities.

The awards ceremony kicked off activities across the state that recognize October as National Disability Employment Awareness Month. This year's theme is "Workers with Disabilities: Talent for a winning team."

Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Click Bishop congratulated the 2007 award recipients.

"Alaska's workers with disabilities are a vital and essential component of Alaska's workforce and future economic development," he said.

The following individuals and businesses were selected as the 2007 award recipients:

The Governor's Award was awarded to Darcy Logan of Palmer. Throughout the more than 20 years that Logan has owned and operated Alaska Vocational & Counseling Services, she has touched the lives of literally thousands of people. The work she does as a counselor is merely an extension of her character. All the residents of the Mat-Su area, especially those who have a disability, are elevated to a higher level of excellence because of Logan's compassion and the services she provides.

The Alaskan of the Year Award honors a person with a disability whose achievements are an inspiration to all. Ruth L'Hommedieu is the Alaskan of the Year. L'Hommedieu has volunteered more than 25 years in the disability field to better the lives of people with disabilities. Most people who work in the disability and senior fields know who she is and are very familiar with all she has accomplished, her commitment, dedication and ongoing efforts. She has a quote in her home that reads, "What I do today is important because I am exchanging a day of my life for it." L'Hommedieu realizes she can keep exchanging each day of her life to help and better the lives of people with disabilities. She is an inspiration to many and is the 2007 Alaskan of the Year.

The Small Employer of the Year was awarded to Pike's Waterfront Lodge in Fairbanks. This

award honors a business with fewer than 200 employees that makes an exceptional effort to employ people with disabilities and comply the Americans with Disabilities Act. Pike's owner, Jay Ramras, the lodge's staff and management are commended for taking the time to carve out positions for people with disabilities to work. Ramras and the lodge's staff see people with disabilities as contributing members of our community, and they believe that everyone who wants to work deserves the chance to work.

The Large Employer of the Year was awarded to Wasilla's Carrs/Safeway store. The store's staff, especially Barrie Brant, are being recognized for going the extra mile to employ people with disabilities. They've also made their store available for training, job search and evaluation services.

The Youth Award recognizes an Alaska student with a disability who excels academically or contributes to the community and serves as an inspiration to other youth with disabilities. This year's Youth Award recipient is Jessica Chapman. During her high school senior year in Ketchikan, Chapman was in a serious car accident and wasn't expected to recover. Yet she overcame the odds and completed her required high school credits. Though Chapman was unable to talk, only had limited use of one hand to communicate and used a wheelchair, she graduated. Since then, Chapman has gotten involved in many local projects and speaks out as an advocate for others. She has courageously tackled issues regarding transportation and accessibility, and is now pursuing a degree through the University of Alaska in Ketchikan.

The Carolyn Peter Volunteerism Award honors a person who devotes considerable time to volunteer activities that affect people with disabilities at local, state or national levels. Matt Jamin of Kodiak is the recipient of this award. He started his career in Kodiak in 1969 where he planned to work for only a year before completing his law degree. He returned in 1975, opened the doors of his new law practice and collaborated with others to start a tribal vocational rehabilitation program through the Kodiak Area Native Association and a Kodiak nonprofit agency, Threshold Services. Jamin still sits on the board of directors for Threshold, a thriving recycling facility that employs more than 15 people with disabilities. With volunteering endless hours and his expert legal advice, he's truly the glue that has kept the organization together.

The Chairperson Award recognizes an individual who is a role model and who has increased the awareness of employing people with disabilities. The winner of the award is Cody K. Hester of Wasilla. Hester, 19, graduated from Wasilla High School in 2006. He has a "can do" attitude, the hallmark of the Alaska Frontier spirit. After graduation, he got a job at the UPS store in Wasilla in their graphic arts design section. With the help of the Department of Labor's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, he enrolled in and completed a college level graphic arts design course. One of Hester's most engaging features is his magnetic smile. He tends to light up a room when he enters in his electric wheelchair. When asked what he wanted to do with his first paycheck, he didn't hesitate – he was going to buy sister an iPod so she could listen to music. Hester tends to be selfless that way. He also hopes to fly his family to Hawaii.

The Hewitt Memorial Award recognizes an outstanding rehabilitation professional who has been of extraordinary benefit to individuals with disabilities. This year's recipient is Karen Coady of Anchorage, the program manager for the Alaska Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired. In her position, Coady serves many roles but none is more important than being a guide, steering the hurt and injured from anger, grief and hopelessness to new-found self confidence and a belief in a successful future. At the center, Coady is the nurturing one, the motherly one, who has been there selflessly, cheering on and encouraging others for over a decade.

The Removal of Attitudinal Barriers Award recognizes an individual who has made a significant contribution to the reduction or elimination of attitudinal barriers for people with disabilities. This year's award recipient is Dave Poulin of Anchorage. He's being recognized for volunteering hundreds of hours to develop the first-ever Alaska paralympic sports program for children and adults with physical disabilities. He was also instrumental in starting the Blaze Sports Alaska Program for school-age children. Poulin's efforts have changed the lives of many young people with physical disabilities throughout the state.

The Barrier-Free Design Award recognizes a builder or architect whose facility design and construction has done the most to improve the awareness of the abilities and potential of people with disabilities. This year's award recipient is John Bachner of Bachner Companies, who designed an accessible and affordable facility space for Access Alaska to lease in Fairbanks. Access Alaska now has exceptional provisions for access and use by people with disabilities. Bachner Companies, with the staff of Access Alaska, developed a floor plan that wasn't only in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, but which specifically met the agency's independent living program needs. The Bachner Companies designed a facility that serves as a model of accessibility for the community of Fairbanks and the entire state of Alaska.

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