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Press Release

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Bear attack survivor Bigley, 9 others to receive 2008 awards from Governor's Committee on Employment and Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities

JUNEAU, Alaska— After a grizzly sow attacked him on the Russian River and ER doctors did the best they could, Dan Bigley's family and friends stood by. A week later, his chances of survival much improved, doctors brought him back from a drug-induced coma to break the news – he was permanently blind.

In the five years since the attack, Bigley has created a life that includes a wife and new son, working towards a master's degree in social work from the University of Alaska Anchorage and an internship working with youth who are emotionally disturbed and their families. He's also writing a book about the attack and its impact on his life.

On Sept. 30 in Fairbanks, Bigley will receive one of 10 awards from the Governor's Committee on Employment and Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities. The ceremony honors individuals, employers and organizations that have helped advance the employment of people with disabilities.

The awards ceremony traditionally begins National Disability Employment Awareness Month in Alaska, which is also observed nationwide.

"All Alaskans are a vital and essential component to our workforce and future economic development," said Labor and Workforce Development Commissioner Click Bishop. "Our Division of Vocational Rehabilitation helps Alaskans with disabilities find and keep jobs."

The following individuals and businesses will be honored in Fairbanks.

Governor's Award recognizes a civic organization that has done the most to improve the potential of people with disabilities. This year's recipient is the Anchorage Police Department's Crisis Intervention Team. It is being recognized for partnering with others to provide education on how to best respond to people who experience mental health issues and are in crisis.

Small Employer of the Year This award honors a business with fewer than 200 employees that makes an exceptional effort to employ people with disabilities and complies with the Americans with

Disabilities Act. Century 16 in Anchorage is the Small Employer of 2008. It is recognized for its ongoing commitment to diversity by employing people with disabilities.

Large Employer of the Year honors a business with more than 200 employees that makes an exceptional effort to employ people with disabilities and complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Fred Meyers on Dimond Blvd. in Anchorage hires and recognizes the important role employees with disabilities play in the workforce.

Youth Award recognizes an Alaskan 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 recipient is Royal Henderson III from Haines. He is being honored for his hard work, boundless enthusiasm, sense of fun and unwavering courage.

Carolyn Peter Volunteerism Award honors a person who devotes considerable time to activities that affect people with disabilities at local, state or national levels. Janel L. Wright of Anchorage, this year's recipient, is honored for ensuring equal rights for people with disabilities and for being a role model to others.

Chairperson Award This year's award recipient is Jane McIntosh of Anchorage, a 30-year employee of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. McIntosh is being recognized for the never-ending support she provides to keep the agency moving forward.

Hewitt Memorial Award recognizes an individual who is an outstanding rehabilitation professional who has been of extraordinary benefit to individuals with disabilities. This year's recipient is Jackie Bisbee of Fairbanks, who is being honored for her dedication and commitment at both the national and state levels to expand and improve Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation services.

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. The recipient of this year's award is Jay Hartman of Fairbanks, an employee of Adult Learning Programs of Alaska. Hartman is recognized for educating the business community about the value of hiring people with disabilities.

Barrier Free Design Award recognizes the owner of a facility whose design has demonstrated easy access and use by people with disabilities. Matanuska Telephone Association's Palmer office is the recipient of this award for owning a building that is accessible for all people.

Alaskan of the Year Award honors a person with a disability whose achievements are an inspiration to all. Dan Bigley of Anchorage was attacked by a grizzly sow in the summer of 2003 that resulted in his complete loss of eyesight. He is being recognized for his strength in pursuing his dreams, his remarkable courage and unending spirit.

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