

VocRehab Perspective

 Newsletter of the West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services

Message from Director Ashworth – A time for celebrations



*Donna L. Ashworth
DRS Director*

At the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), our mission is to enable and empower people with disabilities to work and to live independently. Our goal is to help the individuals we serve to focus on their abilities, while accepting their limitations, in order to become productive members of the state's diverse workforce.

We also work to advance the success of people with disabilities in our society by showcasing their strengths, talents and capabilities that benefit employers and our communities.

This edition of the VocRehab Perspective highlights three significant DRS events that promote National Disability Employment Awareness Month and the vast capabilities and accomplishments of West Virginians with disabilities.

Held annually in October, National Disability Employment Awareness Month is a national campaign that raises awareness about disability employment issues and celebrates the many and varied contributions of America's workers with disabilities. This year's theme was "Expect. Employ. Empower."

Our annual Ability Works Recognition Ceremony, held on Oct. 22, honored six amazing people for their work-related achievements. These individuals reached their personal employment goals by means of their own hard work, perseverance and with assistance from DRS.

This year, DRS initiated the first annual Diversifying Perspectives Art Contest and Exhibition. Open to West Virginia artists with disabilities, this event was an opportunity to highlight the incredible and diverse talents of those with disabilities. The exhibit was prominently displayed in the state Culture Center during the month of October.

DRS also recognizes that local businesses and employers play a vital role in our ability to successfully meet our mission. For this very reason, National Disability Employment Awareness Month was a perfect time for us to show our appreciation of these essential partnerships.

I hope you will make time to read through this edition, and witness the success achieved through empowerment!

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Ability Works Recognition recipients honored

Meet the six outstanding individuals recognized for their hard work and persistence in reaching their employment goals. Awards were presented at the Ability Works Recognition Ceremony in the West Virginia Culture Center Theater, with keynote remarks by Nora Morris, Mrs. West Virginia America.

Daniel Hill - State Winner - Wheeling District

Daniel was born with a congenital, below-the-elbow amputation. In school and in his community, no one really treated him as different.

“Growing up, as far as disability goes, I never considered myself disabled,” explained Daniel. “Being a congenital amputee, you don’t really know any different. I tell people there was really no room to adapt when I was younger. I just kind of figured it out. I was tying my shoes one-handed at the age of four or five, so it wasn’t any different to me.”

After graduating from Parkersburg South High School in 2005, Daniel started his college career at West Virginia University Parkersburg. After two years, he transferred to WVU in Morgantown.

It was during that transition from such a small community to a place where he had to meet new people and make new friends that Daniel began to notice a difference. People began to look at him differently.

During his time at WVU, Daniel started looking into prosthetics and considering what it meant to be an amputee. During his senior year his experiences led him to decide that he wanted to go into the field of prosthetics.

After graduating in 2010 with a bachelor’s degree in exercise science, Daniel started working on his master’s degree in prosthetics and orthotics at the University of Pittsburgh, which he completed in 2012.

As a student at Parkersburg South, Daniel was referred to DRS. Daniel received college financial assistance and DRS purchased a myoelectric prosthetic device that he used during his undergraduate program.

During his graduate program, Daniel had to work in the lab where he actually had to perform tasks that were difficult to do using his more “cosmetic” prosthetic device. He reverted back to using a device with a hook and continues to do so today.

“Being in graduate school for prosthetics, we were literally talking about prosthetics all day,” said Daniel. “Other students were asking me questions about being an amputee; it really opened me up to it. For the first time, I was truly secure about being an amputee.”

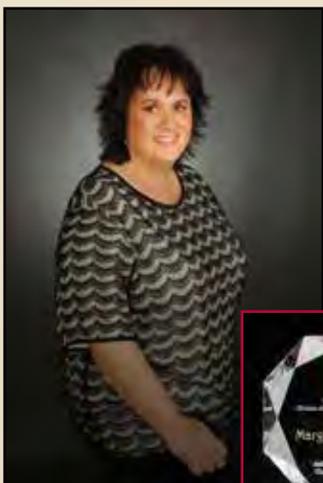
Daniel currently works as a certified prosthetist in Hanger Clinic’s Morgantown and Bridgeport offices and he loves what he does. “I think it’s important to not just love your job, but be interested in it. I love to learn about it.”

Daniel believes that his patients do benefit from his life experience. For someone who has lost a limb, there’s definitely an adjustment period.

“Not only do you not know how you’re going to perform some tasks, but a lot of these amputees can be afraid to go back out in public. They don’t know what people are going to think of them now. They don’t want to be disabled. So to be able to see me; I’m working. I guess I’m somewhat successful in the workforce. To see how fluent – how confident – I am with my prosthetic, I think it definitely provides some comfort to them.”



Ability Works Recognition recipients pose with Nora Morris, Mrs. West Virginia America.



Margie Starcher – Charleston District

Margie Starcher grew up in Spencer, graduating from Spencer High School in 1989. She went on to Marshall University, earning a bachelor's degree in accounting in 1993.

After college, she worked for a couple of accounting firms until she started her own accounting practice in 2008. In 2010, Margie took on a second job as site manager of Hart House, a 20-unit apartment complex for seniors with disabilities in Spencer.

Margie oversaw the property, processing applications, handling accounts payables and receivables and even performing some basic maintenance work for tenants.

In 2011, Margie began experiencing weakness in her right hand. She noticed that her speech seemed to be “thick,” and people were having difficulty understanding her.

She received the devastating diagnosis of ALS, or Lou Gehrig's disease, a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and the spinal cord.



Margie reached out to DRS because she quickly began having difficulty at work and was extremely concerned about losing her independence due to the nature of her disability.

Margie had always worked and she had a strong work ethic. She was in dire need of services that would enable her to keep working.

DRS provided some modifications at home to help her be able to get ready for work each day independently and also worksite accommodations to help her continue performing her work duties at Hart House.

With the assistance she received from DRS and her own extremely powerful strong will and determination, Margie continued working at Hart House until two weeks prior to her death in May 2014. She was just 42 years old.

Debbie Waldron, district manager of Encore Management, the property management company that owns Hart House, credits Margie for being an excellent employee. “She was dedicated. She could do anything. She was just so conscientious, even up until the last minute.”

Cassie Heaster – Clarksburg District

When Cassie was just two, doctors discovered that she had bilateral profound hearing loss. The cause of which is unknown.

Cassie grew up in Weston, with a very supportive family. She attended West Virginia School for the Deaf in Romney, graduating in 2010.

During her senior year, she was chosen to be prom queen and her academic accomplishments earned her the honor of salutatorian. To help her transition from high school to employment, Cassie's principal referred her to DRS.

After considering all the options, Cassie chose to further her education at Potomac State College in Keyser. She enrolled in the tourism and hospitality program, which has a strong emphasis on the culinary arts.

According to Cassie, DRS helped her to prepare for college and ultimately for getting a job. Her rehabilitation counselor helped her to learn about the things she needed to have for school and helped her access accommodations that would enable her to succeed in school. She earned her associate's degree in 2012.

Cassie credits a chef and one of her mentors at Potomac State College for helping her to land her current job at West Virginia University Dining Services.

After she was hired, Cassie received on-the-job training to help her develop her skills and techniques. The university provides a sign language interpreter who comes to Cassie's jobsite a couple of hours a day, five days a week to help communicate specific work tasks that are required of her during the day.

“I really like having the ability to work hard and to help other people and see my work benefit other people.”



Kelly Sears - Beckley District

Kelly grew up in Raleigh County. After graduating from Independence High School, he started working in the construction business, building houses for about 15 years.

In his spare time, Kelly loved to hunt. In November 2010, Kelly went to his tree stand, a very routine occurrence for him. But that day was not routine and his life changed dramatically.

Kelly fell from his tree stand, hitting the ground about 20 feet below him. He lost consciousness and when he awoke, he was unable to move his legs. Lying on the ground for seven hours, he was unsure that anyone would even look for him. Luckily, his family found him and he was flown by helicopter to Charleston Area Medical Center.

Kelly had suffered a spinal cord injury, which left him paralyzed. About a year later, Kelly's sister persuaded him to seek assistance from DRS. He had been a construction worker most of his life and was now unsure of what he wanted to do and what he was capable of doing. He also had a relatively new pickup truck that he was no longer able to get into or drive independently.

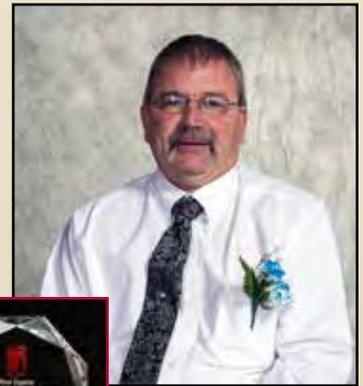
DRS was able to evaluate and modify Kelly's home to make getting ready for work less challenging.

DRS assistance also helped Kelly to secure a truck that could be modified for his use. He received training on how to drive. He had to learn how to work mechanical hand controls and the equipment to get in and out of his vehicle on his own. Kelly was quick to make the adjustment to a new way of driving.

A community-based assessment at Lillian James Learning Center helped him to identify his capabilities and determine a vocational goal. According to Kelly, the work in the wood shop was right up his alley. The wood shop refurbishes and repairs antique furniture, restoring it to its original state. They also custom build antique-looking furniture and modern furniture.

Through an on-the-job training program, Kelly learned the skills he needed to be a woodworking assistant and he was ultimately hired by the learning center.

Tammy McKinney, who supervises the wood shop, believes Kelly's experience building houses is an asset for the business, but one of the best things he brings to the table is his attitude. It's his "well if you show me how to do that, I'll do my best at it" approach to doing things that got their attention.



Kayla Manley - Huntington District



Kayla struggled throughout school. And, as high school graduation approached, Kayla recognized that she was lacking focus.

Throughout middle and high school, Kayla's biggest challenge was trying to pay attention. She had to work so much harder than her classmates. Kayla would sit in the front row of class in order to make herself focus on the blackboard. However, she still fought to concentrate on the topic at hand.

According to Kayla, homework was a constant battle. "I would start one thing and never go back to it. I would pass back by it an hour or two later and remember, 'oh that's what I was doing, that's right, I need to do this.'" She just couldn't make herself sit down and do the work. She'd find herself doodling or getting sidetracked on other tasks.

A friend of Kayla's suggested that she talk to someone at DRS. Medical testing and evaluations led to a diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, otherwise known as ADHD, which manifests itself through symptoms including difficulty staying focused and paying attention, trouble controlling behavior and hyperactivity.

Kayla graduated from Lincoln County High School in 2009. After exploring her vocational interests, Kayla really wanted to work in the medical field.

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Kayla ultimately enrolled at Huntington Junior College and she thrived in the dental assistant program, graduating in 2013.

Presently, 23-year-old Kayla is working as a certified dental assistant at Warnick and Semder Dentistry in St. Albans. She needed an internship and she reached out to them. After obtaining her internship hours, they hired her as a full-time dental assistant.

As part of her responsibilities, she prepares instruments for the different procedures scheduled during the day, makes sure the rooms are set up and everything is sterilized, as well as keeping inventory of supplies.

Kayla believes that people need to look differently at ADHD because some write it off as an excuse to get out of doing things.

“My mom always said that I just needed to pay attention and she didn’t understand that I couldn’t pay attention,” said Kayla. “After I was actually tested and diagnosed, I noticed a complete difference in what I was before and afterwards.”

Daniel Garletts - Martinsburg District

What started as a routine day for Daniel Garletts abruptly changed direction and instantly turned his life into a living nightmare.

Daniel had a wife, four kids and a good job doing historic renovation work for nine months of the year and working with the Whitetail National Ski Patrol during the winter months.

On January 22, 1999, Daniel was headed to his daughter’s school to talk about his work with the ski patrol. He never made it. He was hit head-on by a drunk driver.

As a result of the automobile accident, Daniel sustained a traumatic brain injury, as well as soft tissue injuries to his neck, shoulder and knee. Daniel describes the first four years after his injury as a nightmare. His short-term memory was gone and he was lost for a long time in a state of confusion. He could no longer work or drive safely.

While involved in physical and cognitive therapies, Daniel was referred to DRS by some of his medical professionals.

Daniel wanted to get his life back, but didn’t know where to begin. A volunteer opportunity at City Hospital in Martinsburg helped him to find his path. He started working one day a week in the transitional care unit, where the patients received a lot of occupational therapy.

His visits with patients who had recently suffered a stroke inspired him. He felt himself identifying with the patients who frequently could not speak coherently due to effects of the stroke. He knew they were scared and feeling isolated, but he was able to provide them with some reassurance that things would get better.

This experience helped him to realize that he wanted to work in occupational therapy because it brings hope back to people who have suffered an injury or a trauma.

With assistance from DRS, Daniel went back to school to pursue his dream. He earned an associate’s degree in psychology from Hagerstown Community College.

In 2011, Daniel graduated from Allegany College in Maryland with an occupational therapy assistant degree.

When he was nominated for this award, Daniel was working as an occupational therapy assistant for Panhandle Home Health, a local home health agency in Berkeley County.

Daniel recently accepted an occupational therapy assistant position with the VA Medical Center in Fayetteville, North Carolina, where he can fulfill his dream of working with veterans.

According to Daniel, “I’m encouraged by the people I have been able to help... When you change somebody’s life for the better... that feels pretty good.”



2014 Diversifying Perspectives Art Contest and Exhibition

The Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), in partnership with the West Virginia Office of the Secretary of Education and the Arts and the Division of Culture and History, proudly presented the first annual Diversifying Perspectives Art Contest and Exhibition.

“This contest and exhibition allow us to feature the artistic abilities of West Virginia artists with disabilities during National Disability Employment Awareness Month and plays an important role in bringing awareness to disability-related employment issues,” said DRS Director Donna Ashworth.

The artwork selected as the Grand Exhibitor was incorporated into a poster promoting National Disability Employment Awareness Month. The poster was displayed in businesses throughout West Virginia.

The exhibition opened with a reception Sept. 16 at the Culture Center in Charleston and remained on display through Oct. 31. Forty-seven entries were received.

Grand Exhibitor:

Benjamin DiGiorgi from South Charleston for his oil and pastel painting titled, *The Magical Owl*.

DiGiorgi, a lifetime resident of South Charleston, is a 2014 graduate of South Charleston High School. DiGiorgi has autism and had to work extra hard throughout school. He became interested in art as a teenager and especially likes to draw owls.



Benjamin DiGiorgi and Education and the Arts Cabinet Secretary Kay Goodwin unveil the National Disability Employment Awareness Month poster featuring DiGiorgi's painting.



Education and the Arts Cabinet Secretary Kay Goodwin, Kelsey Bable and DRS Director Donna Ashworth

Award of Excellence winners:

Kelsey Bable from Follansbee for her mixed media collage titled, *The Butterflies Are Free*.

Bable is studying art therapy at West Liberty University. She was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in her senior year at Brooke High School.

John Panek from Shinnston for his colored pencil drawing titled, *1920s Dirt Track Racing*.

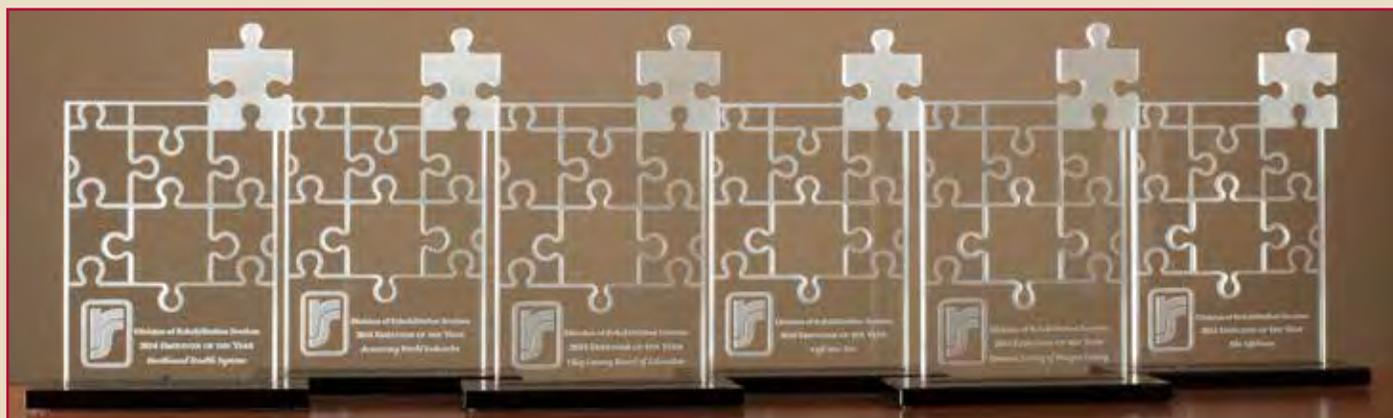
A West Virginia resident since 1995, Panek grew up in Arlington Heights, Illinois. He is a graduate of the American Academy of Art in Chicago. Panek contracted polio during the 1952 epidemic and he now has post-polio syndrome.

Greg Siegwart from Wheeling for his oil painting titled, *Occupational Hazard*.

Siegwart is a self-taught artist who began painting at the age of 10. As an adult, he experienced a traumatic brain injury as a result of an automobile accident. He found oil painting to be his therapeutic refuge and it became his life.



Education and the Arts Cabinet Secretary Kay Goodwin, John Panek and DRS Director Donna Ashworth



Local employers complete the puzzle

To show appreciation to local businesses and employers who support the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), a nomination process is utilized to select employers to receive Employer of the Year and Distinguished Employer awards in each district.

“The partnerships with businesses that are jointly developed and nurtured serve as the foundation for our ultimate success,” said DRS Director Donna Ashworth. “The employers recognized are progressive in their attitudes and they empower people with disabilities by providing them with job opportunities.”

The selected employers recognize the abilities and the positive contributions individuals with disabilities bring to the workplace. Employers are nominated by DRS vocational rehabilitation professionals and selected for recognition based upon their consideration and contributions to the employment of DRS clients.

Many of those selected demonstrate extraordinary consideration in providing accommodations that help an individual perform the tasks associated with his or her job, while other employers consistently provide employment opportunities to DRS clients.

Clay County Board of Education, Clay Charleston District Employer of the Year

Distinguished Employers:

- ◆ Hardman’s Do It Center, Ripley
- ◆ Magic Years DayCare Center, Inc., Point Pleasant
- ◆ Save-A-Lot, Spencer
- ◆ Applebee’s, Hurricane

Bruce Hardwood Flooring, Beverly Clarksburg District Employer of the Year

Distinguished Employers:

- ◆ YMCA, Elkins
- ◆ Cubby’s Child Care Center, Bridgeport
- ◆ Fairmont State University, Fairmont

Northwood Health Systems, Wheeling Wheeling District Employer of the Year

Distinguished Employers:

- ◆ Weirton Christian Center, Weirton
- ◆ Kmart, Parkersburg
- ◆ Wendy’s, New Martinsville and St. Marys

Café One Ten, Oak Hill Beckley District Employer of the Year

Distinguished Employers:

- ◆ Kroger (Beckley Crossing location), Beckley
- ◆ West Virginia Division of Highways, Princeton
- ◆ Jackson’s Meat Shop, Summersville
- ◆ Four Jaks Inc., Lewisburg

The Lifehouse, Inc., Huntington Huntington District Employer of the Year

Distinguished Employers:

- ◆ Clean Cutz Barber Shop, Huntington
- ◆ Welch Community Hospital, Welch
- ◆ Dignity Hospice, Chapmanville

Humane Society of Morgan County, Berkeley Springs Martinsburg District Employer of the Year

Distinguished Employers:

- ◆ Food Lion, Romney
- ◆ Potomac Highlands Guild Inc., Petersburg

West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services
Administrative Offices
107 Capitol Street
Charleston, West Virginia 25301-2609



Did you know?

People with disabilities have skills, pursue meaningful careers and play an important role in America's educational and economic success. Some prime examples are:

Helen Keller became a famous writer despite being blind and deaf.

United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt used a wheelchair because of his disability while he was president.

Jim Abbott was born with only one hand and became a famous pitcher for the New York Yankees.

Beethoven continued playing piano and composing music after losing his hearing.

John Nash, originally from West Virginia, won a nobel prize for his mathematical work despite having schizophrenia.

James Earl Jones became a famous actor known for his voice even though he had a speech impairment.

VocRehab Perspective publication information

The VocRehab Perspective is a publication of the West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS). Questions and comments may be directed to Tracy Carr, Senior Manager of Governmental and Public Relations.

DRS is a division of the West Virginia Department of Education and the Arts.



West Virginia
Division of Rehabilitation Services
1-800-642-8207
www.wvdrs.org



West Virginia
Department of **Education** and the **Arts**