



Welcoming Motivated Workers!

ABILITIES

Promoting the employment of Vermont citizens of all abilities

July 2008 - Vol 2, Issue 3

Dear Friends ~ Celebrating the 2008 Governor's Awards Winners



In 1989, the Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (GCEPD) began recognizing individuals, businesses, media or municipalities that have made significant contributions to the employment of people with disabilities. Currently, over sixty Vermont businesses and individuals have been honored. That number was increased on June 9th at the 5th Governor's Summit for the Employment of People with Disabilities, when eight businesses and individuals received awards from Governor Jim Douglas for their efforts to promote the employment of Vermonters with physical, mental, emotional and/or other disabilities.

The mission of the GCEPD is to promote equal employment for all citizens of Vermont by advising the Governor, and through the formation of partnerships with business, government and people with disabilities. It is individuals and entities such as those recognized by the Governor's Awards that give meaning and life to our mission. To the nominees and winners of the Governor's Awards - past and present - and to all of you in the employment and service sector that work so hard to ensure that individuals with disabilities are given every opportunity for meaningful and successful employment, we salute you.

Best regards,

Fred Jones, Chair,

Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities

and

Susan Chicoine, on behalf of the Vermont Business Leadership Network

In This Issue

About the Governor's Awards

Award Winners in the Employment Category

Award Winner for Design & Accessibility

Award Winner for Media - Public Education

Winner of the Governor's Award for Outstanding Effort

About the Governor's Awards

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. This year awards were given in different subcategories associated with either the type of business or the nature of the employment practices. These subcategories were:

- Employment - Supported Employment
- Employment - Youth in Transition
- Employment - Corporate
- Employment - Small Business
- Employment - Accommodation

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

The Media - Public Education Award presented this year recognized dedicated efforts to promote public awareness and understanding of the respect, dignity and equality to which all people with disabilities are entitled.

The fourth award presented this year, the Governor's Award for Outstanding Effort, is a discretionary award only given when an employer, business, or organization truly exemplifies a mission to promote the employment of people with disabilities.

Award Winners in the Employment Category

Here are the 2008 Governor's Awards winners in the Employment Category.





From left to right: Governor Jim Douglas; Claude Bouchard; Kevin O'Brien, Darcy Nutter, Colleen Mollica, Joel Melnick, Mark Helijas, and Fred Jones, chair of the GCEPD

Employment - Supported Employment Award:

Joel Melnick, President, Nathaniel Group Inc. - Vergennes, Vermont

The **Employment - Supported Employment Award** is presented to an employer who reflects the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act in their employment practices by offering employment support services such as job coaches, specialized job training, and individually tailored supervision.

This year the award was presented to **Joel Melnick** and **Nathaniel Group Inc.** for its well established culture of providing supported employment opportunities to individuals. The nominator, a parent of a young adult with significant cognitive limitations who has worked for Nathaniel Group for the past 9 years, states that Mr. Melnick has demonstrated a remarkable openness to bringing students with disabilities into its workplace and an overall caring for workers with special abilities. His daughter has developed new friendships and a very responsible work ethic as a result of the kind, respectful, and inclusive nature of the work environment found at Nathaniel Group.



Employment - Youth In Transition Award:

Colleen Mollica, Vice President of Human Resources, VERMED, the Medical Sensor Company, Bellows Falls, Vermont

The **Employment - Youth In Transition Award** is presented to an employer who reflects the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act in their employment practices by providing employment opportunities for young adults transitioning from high school.

This year the award was presented to **Colleen Mollica** and **VERMED, The Medical Sensor Company** in recognition of its





strong collaborative relationship with the Occupational Development Program at Springfield High School, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Health Care and Rehabilitation Services. Through these collaborations, a number of students with disabilities have found opportunities for on the job training and work experience at VERMED, which has translated into a paid position following high school graduation for at least four youth. Ms. Mollica has shown a willingness to make accommodations for students and to allow for modification of processes. She has allowed the students in training to feel fully part of the staff by providing VERMED jackets and tee shirts and even arranging for a birthday celebration. The

supportive philosophy of VERMED can best be described by Ms. Mollica's frequent refrain: "Thank you for bringing the students here; they add so much to our business and we all love having them here."

Employment - Corporate Award:

Price Chopper Vermont, accepted by Darcy Nutter, and Kevin O'Brien, Store Manager, Price Chopper, Bennington, Vermont

The **Employment - Corporate Award** is presented to a corporate employer who reflects the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act in their employment practices. This year two awards were given in this category: one, to recognize the general employment practices of Price Chopper supermarkets in Vermont, and the second in recognition of the specific practices of Kevin O'Brien and the Price Chopper store in Bennington.

The Price Chopper commitment and philosophy is epitomized by the practices of the **Bennington Price Chopper and its store manager, Kevin O'Brien**, whose particular efforts are recognized by this award. The Bennington Price Chopper has a long and quiet history of offering employment to persons with disabilities. The commitment of Price Chopper to the employment success of these individuals can be seen in the high level of their performance, which reflects solid training, attention to the tasks of the job, and the ability to handle a sometimes very busy work environment. A number of individuals with disabilities have found long term employment with Price Chopper, allowing them to maintain their independence. Bennington agencies that work closely with Price Chopper to develop jobs for consumers state that the company provides solid



training and supports to enable people with disabilities to succeed in the workplace.



Employment - Small Business Award:

Claude Bouchard, Owner, Bouchard's Expert Automotive Repair, St. Albans, Vermont

The **Employment - Small Business Award** is presented to an employer operating a small business whose employment practices reflect the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act. This year the award was presented to **Claude Bouchard, owner of Bouchard's Expert Automotive Repair**. Mr. Bouchard has consistently given individuals with disabilities opportunities to participate in work experiences and assessments in his business. He has hired individuals with disabilities and written letters of references for others after they have completed their experience. To paraphrase his nominator: "He has worked with some challenging people and doesn't give up, giving them a chance to get their hands dirty and feel they have a chance in the world of work. He has fostered positive relationships for those that need them. For giving back to his community through interviews, work experiences, and job hires, Claude is a prime example of someone who deserves the Governor's award."



Employment - Accommodation Award:

Mark Helijas, Executive Director, Turning Point Club, White River Junction, Vermont

The **Employment - Accommodation Award** is presented to an employer whose employment practices reflect the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act. This year the award was presented to **Mark Helijas, Executive Director of the Turning Point Club** in recognition of his willingness to provide accommodations for employees with mental illness. His vision, reflected in his employment practices, is to shine a light to erase the stigma that causes individuals with mental illness to be discriminated against in the workplace. In doing so, he provides the acceptance and support that allows and encourages employees to be useful, in charge, and at their best,



without ever feeling "less than". To quote one of his nominators: "Mark treats everyone fairly. I live with depression and anxiety every day. Knowing that Mark won't fire me if I get mildly depressed or even depressed enough to need hospitalization makes me a better person. I love being useful and helpful in my job. Mark makes it possible for me to do that."



Award Winner for Design & Accessibility

Design & Accessibility Award:

Mark Harvie, President, Omni Medical Systems, Milton, Vermont

The **Design & Accessibility Award** is presented to an architect, contractor, business, municipality, recreational facility or entity that has designed accommodations and provisions to create equal and aesthetic access, or who has created innovative and creative solutions for accessible structures, buildings or services.

This year the award was presented to **Mark Harvie, President of Omni Medical Systems** and accepted by Anna Mayka. When Omni moved into a



new manufacturing location, it constructed a mezzanine to house several work stations. Regulations required the provision of vertical access to this mezzanine to provide access for individuals using a wheelchair or otherwise requiring accommodation. Omni could have complied with these regulations by installing a basic vertical platform lift hidden in an out-of-the way location, as is often done. However, Mr. Harvie chose instead to showcase accessibility by making the lift the focal point of Omni's reception area. He went far beyond the minimum requirements and installed a custom lift made of glass and stainless steel, placed in a 4-sided glass shaft with automatic sliding glass doors. This lift is the first of its kind in Vermont, and a rarity elsewhere in the US.

Award Winner for Media - Public Education

Media - Public Education Award:

David Townsend, President and Owner, Small Planet, Inc., Rutland,

Vermont

The **Media - Public Education Award** was presented to **David Townsend of Small Planet, Inc.** for his dedication in promoting public awareness and understanding of the respect, dignity, and equality to which all people with disabilities are entitled.

As a member of the Rutland Region Business Advisory Council, Mr. Townsend has taken a lead role in developing a website and collateral marketing materials to be used to promote employment for people with disabilities. The intent is to raise the awareness of the business community about the potential benefits of hiring individuals with a disability and about the organizations that support this mission. In addition, Mr. Townsend is a vocal advocate to the business community, speaking at business events to share with employers his experiences in employing and training people with disabilities. He has also shared his story in a recent issue of the Governor's Committee newsletter, which has a wide audience throughout Vermont. For his energetic and passionate initiative to facilitate and lead a partnership of agencies and businesses, and to educate the broader business community about the hiring of individuals with disabilities, Mr. Townsend was recognized with the 2008 Media - Public Education Award.



Winner of the Governor's Award for Outstanding Effort

Governor's Award for Outstanding Effort:

***Robert Johnson, CEO, and
Evelyn McLean, Director of Human Resources
Omega Optical, Inc., Brattleboro, Vermont***

The **Governor's Award for Outstanding Effort** is presented only when an employer, business, or organization truly exemplifies a mission to promote employment of people with disabilities. This year the award was given to **Robert Johnson, CEO of Omega Optical, Inc.** and **Evelyn McLean, Director of Human Resources.**

Since its founding by current President Robert Johnson in 1968, Omega Optical has successfully grown to a world class company with well over 100 employees. Such growth is due not only to its continuous commitment to quality products and services, but also to its outstanding community involvement and strong belief in a diverse workforce. A large number of individuals with





various disabilities have been hired and retained by Omega Optical over the years. Whenever a worker with a disability needs and asks for a reasonable accommodation, Omega Optical management does not hesitate to support their request. If technical assistance is requested, the company routinely collaborates with Vocational Rehabilitation, VABIR, and other

external agencies to determine the appropriate accommodations so that their employees can continue to succeed at work. Omega Optical is a highly progressive, innovative company, with employees working hard to produce specialty filters such as those on the Hubble telescope. They are also innovative in their ability to see individuals as individuals - to see what they can offer the company and what the company can offer them. This 2008 Governor's Award for Outstanding Effort celebrates and honors Omega Optical for being a true role model when it comes to hiring and employing individuals with disabilities.

Quick Links

[The Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities](#)

[Vermont Business Leadership Network](#)

[Department of Labor Disability Program Navigators](#)

[Vocational Rehabilitation](#)

[Vermont Association of Business, Industry and Rehabilitation](#)

[Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired](#)

[Job Accommodation Network](#)

[Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council](#)

[Vermont Department of Health on Autism](#)

[Guide to Services in Vermont for People with Autism Spectrum Disorders](#)

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

Melita DeBellis,

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

and

Christine McCarthy

Vermont Business Leadership Network
vabired@aol.com; 802-878-1107; www.vtbln.org

[Forward email](#)

 **SafeUnsubscribe®**

This email was sent to melita@gcepd.org by melita@gcepd.org.

[Update Profile/Email Address](#) | Instant removal with [SafeUnsubscribe™](#) | [Privacy Policy](#).

Email Marketing by



