

Governor's Committee on Employment
of People with Disabilities



Welcoming Motivated Workers!

ABILITIES

Promoting the employment of Vermont citizens of all abilities

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Dear Friends ~

Welcome to our second issue of *Abilities*. We received many positive reactions to our inaugural issue and appreciate your warm reception. We look forward to continuing to provide you with inspiring and useful information so that you, too, can promote the employment of Vermont citizens of all abilities!

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

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A Message from Governor Jim Douglas



Vermont citizens of all abilities who want a job should have the opportunity and supports to work. Meaningful employment at a livable wage provides individuals and families with a foundation to develop personal responsibility, effective relationships, and self respect. As such, I welcome the launch of "Abilities" as a new and powerful tool to support employers and job seekers to advance this important cause.

Vermont faces a huge challenge as its population ages and many young people leave the state: how will business and industry find the workers they require in order to thrive? Vermont must improve its workforce development system in order to ensure the State's continued economic vitality. Tapping into the often overlooked and undeveloped labor pool of Vermonters who have disabilities is a valuable solution.

I invite business leaders across Vermont to use this newsletter as a source of both information and inspiration that will result in new and creative partnerships for coordinated job development and placement. May it inspire you to see ways that you can benefit- and make a difference - through new approaches to your employment practices.

Sincerely,

Jim Douglas, Governor
State of Vermont

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

Mark's Story - Accommodating Aging-Related Disabilities to Ensure Continued Employment Success



The damage was likely done as a teenager enjoying the challenge target shooting, but for Mark Gates, the real challenge began four years ago, when he was 50. That's when he started to notice his hearing loss.

For any one of us, a decline in our ability to hear can be frustrating or disconcerting. For a Registered Nurse in intensive care like Mark, who relies on his hearing to help him make accurate health assessments and hear subtle changes in heart and lung sounds with his stethoscope, the loss of hearing also generated fear and anxiety about the possible loss of his career and livelihood. Successfully employed at Southwestern Vermont Medical Center (SVMC) for almost 35 years (starting with a summer job in housekeeping after college), Mark worried his hearing loss might be the beginning of the end.

For a time he had been able to compensate by making personal adjustments or calling on the assistance of colleagues. Luckily, he could easily hear the pitch of the alarms of the equipment. However, conversation with patients became difficult when they would turn their heads away. Telephone discussion with physicians also became troublesome. To ensure accuracy and patient safety, he would ask colleagues to listen to a patient's heart or lungs. His declining hearing became the "nasty little secret" that other colleagues were aware of but no one would discuss.

Eventually, in Mark's words, "the bottom fell out". He could no longer compensate for his hearing loss, and he had fewer available colleagues to call upon. That's when he knew he had to take action. He began by having a rudimentary hearing check by the Employee Health nurse at the hospital, which resulted in an initial identification of the level of his hearing loss. Yet, even this simple step was not without its anxiety.

In his 35 years at SVMC, Mark had experienced nothing to indicate that the hospital would be anything other than supportive of him and his situation. Nonetheless, he found himself quite concerned about how hospital management might react to his hearing loss and whether his career might be cut short. While he had watched the hospital support others who suddenly had a disability, he also felt that there often comes a time when an employer can't do anything more, and he hated to think of that. This apprehension stopped him in his tracks and delayed his seeking help.

Facing the reality of the audiogram results, Mark began wondering how he might get support from the State of Vermont, so he went to the State website and began to read about the mission of Vocational Rehabilitation (VocRehab). He realized here he would find the help he needed, and soon

- about one year ago - he began working with William (Will) Pendlebury, a VR Counselor for the Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, Late-Deafened and Deaf-Blind. He was sent for a more extensive audiogram and then, working one ear at a time, he was fitted with high caliber, digital hearing aids. Will was also able to help Mark secure a subsidy to help pay for the aids, which cost \$2,700 each and were not covered by his insurance.

As a result of the support and accommodations obtained through VocRehab, Mark is still working capably and successfully in his position as an ICU nurse. His hearing of heart and lung sounds is perfect now. In conversation he may on occasion miss a certain tone, but he simply asks folks to repeat themselves. He hasn't required any other accommodation from VocRehab or the hospital. If he needs to hear every sentence of a phone call, he will sit in a quiet room and turn up the volume on the phone. He has not required the additional accommodation of an electronic stethoscope.

Mark made the rounds after he was fitted with his first hearing aide, starting with the medical Chief of Staff, the medical director of the ICU, and his manager, to make sure all of them were aware of his hearing loss and the accommodations he had received. The reactions from his managers and his colleagues were universally supportive and congratulatory. There was also an appreciation that hearing loss often comes with aging.

Today, four years later, Mark feels very confident about his hearing and about the support he has received. He has been able to put his worry about job loss behind him. Furthermore, his hope is that his courage to investigate his hearing loss and hearing aides will help and inspire others.

More information on accommodating older adults with disabilities

Job Accommodation Network - Consultant's Corner

Our Aging Workforce: A Look at the Benefits of Job Accommodation

[From the desk of Beth Loy, Ph.D](#)

Today, more than 35 million Americans are over age 65, and that number is expected to double over the next 30 years as baby boomers age ([U.S. Administration on Aging, 2005](#)). Whether for monetary or social reasons, many individuals continue working after age 65. There are several federal employment laws that could protect these older workers from discrimination. These include the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Older Americans Act of 1965 (OAA), the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) of 1967, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), which requires employers to provide accommodations for older workers with disabilities. Though it may be a legal requirement that employers make accommodations for their aging workforce, it also makes good economic sense. Older workers are a vital segment of today's workforce. The Older Workers Survey ([SHRM Survey Program, 2003](#)) reported several possible advantages to hiring older workers; these benefits include that older workers:

- Are more willing to work different schedules,

- Serve as mentors for workers with less experience,
- Have invaluable experience,
- Are more reliable,
- Have higher retention rates,
- Have more knowledge and skills, and
- Are more productive.

Some older individuals have retired from one form of work and chose to switch careers or work part-time to earn extra money and maintain insurance benefits, keep active, learn new skills, or socialize. With the aging of the baby-boom generation, the average age for workers will increase, and the likelihood that more employees will be managing a disability rises.

Many individuals will continue to work at full production with no accommodations. However, aging may contribute to limitations that can easily and cheaply be accommodated. Age-related limitations can involve a wide range of conditions, including depression and anxiety, repetitive use injuries, and other cognitive, sensory, and physical limitations.

Individuals may need accommodations related to the psychological aspects of aging, mobility, fatigue, cognitive limitations, and vision and hearing impairments. For ideas on how to accommodate older workers, see [JAN's Fact Sheet on Accommodations for the Aging Workforce](#).

As many of us age, our limitations may be from aging, returning to work after an injury, the occurrence of a primary disability, the exacerbation of a long-term impairment, and/or prevention of a secondary impairment. However, employing an aging and productive workforce brings invaluable knowledge, diversity, reliability, and experience to a workplace. Accommodating and employing aging workers can be an easy way to improve teamwork and morale, which can foster success in every workplace.

[Click here for more information on Aging Workforce Resources](#)

References:

1. U.S. Administration on Aging. (2005). Statistics on the aging population. Retrieved June 8, 2005, from <http://www.aoa.gov/prof/Statistics/statistics.asp>
2. [SHRM](#) Survey Program. (2003). 2003 SHRM/NOWCC/CED Older workers survey. Alexandria, Virginia: SHRM Research.

For additional information on accommodation ideas and the Americans with Disabilities Act, [contact](#) JAN directly.

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Second Chance to Experience Scott Chesney!



Spend a day with Scott Chesney, and it will change your life. Scott is an internationally recognized motivational speaker, and founder of Devotion to Motion. Thanks in part to foundation grants from the Christopher Reeve Paralysis Foundation and the Sandy Hill Foundation, VABIR has brought Scott to Vermont to conduct several workshops around the State for people with disabilities and local employers.

At the age of 15, Scott awoke one morning with a numb toe. Within forty-eight hours, he was paralyzed from the waist down. He was diagnosed with

a rare arteriovenous malformation. The barriers Scott faced were great. "While I recall the physical challenges that I had to navigate, no challenge can compare to the major challenge I created by not dealing with my emotions. My life got even faster when I became paralyzed because I did not want to deal with all the loss, disappointment, sadness, and anger that was within me. Even though I could no longer run, I was running away from myself. My disability scared me, so rather than focusing on it, I created a busy-ness in my life that left me with little or no idle time."

Since then he has traveled the world talking about his life journey and his travels around the world where he has experienced many forms of healing. When asked what inspired him to become a motivational speaker, Scott says, "A calling to make a difference in this world. When I first entered the workforce after college in 1992, I was given a job in research at a prominent public relations' firm in NYC. While it was a great first job, I really was not interacting with too many people and did not feel like I was making a difference. Then, in 1994, the opportunity to share my own story combined with research ongoing at The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis, the world's largest research center devoted to spinal cord injury, was too enticing to pass up. The desire to make even more of a difference through speaking came as the result of my two world tours."

Scott's message is strong. Become Fearless is the first step on his list of "musts". The second step is to Do a Head-Heart Shift. When asked how he helps motivate people with disabilities to overcome their limitations, Scott says, "Empowerment. As the old saying goes, "don't give a person fish, teach one how to fish." I try to help people recognize their own greatness and tap into that unlimited amount of power and energy that we all have. The bottom line is that the only place a true disability can reside is in one's attitude and that really applies to each and every individual who has ever walked or rolled the face of this Earth. We can choose to focus on the things that we can't do or we can choose to focus on the things we can do. Our greatest power as human beings is our power to choose, but there are too many people, with and without disabilities, who give away this power too easily. That is when we lose energy, lose our drive, and have a difficult time locating our purpose in life. Without a purpose, we have no direction. People with and without disabilities need to realize that we all have unique gifts and talents that we need to be sharing with the rest of the world. If we don't share them, not only are we doing ourselves a disservice, but we are also not doing what we can for others."

When speaking to employers Scott speaks on Maximizing Corporate Life by Hiring People with Disabilities. Here his list of "musts" includes education on people with disabilities, becoming an effective communicator and listener with people with disabilities, finding success stories of people with disabilities and cultivating an attitude of gratitude. Employers walk away with not only ideas for their business, but ideas on their own lives as well.

Since January, Scott has spoken to groups in St. Johnsbury and Burlington. His message was inspiring. [Scott will be speaking in Middlebury this summer.](#) His workshops are free of charge, but [seating is limited.](#) [If you are interested in attending contact VABIR, 800-639-2909.](#)

For more information on Scott, visit his website at www.scottchesney.com.

A call for nominations for the 2006 Governor's Awards



The Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (GCEPD) is currently seeking nominations for their annual awards. Awards will be presented to individuals, businesses, media or municipalities that have made significant contributions to the employment of people with disabilities. The awards ceremony will take place in the fall; date and location will be announced in the near future.

The nomination deadline for the 2006 awards is June 15, 2007.

Every year, the GCEPD presents awards 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. The **Design/Accessibility Award** is for an 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 Award** honors print and broadcast reporting that recognizes the importance of equality and dignity regarding disability. A fourth award, **the Governor's Award for Outstanding Effort**, may also be given if the committee believes it is appropriate.

People are encouraged to nominate Vermont businesses, individuals or municipalities that have contributed to the employment of people with disabilities. 2005 award winners included Susan Chicoine and Charles LeTourneau of TDBanknorth and Alice Dermody of Aramark Food Services for employment/accommodation efforts; Mark Stewart of MGS Architects of Newport, Vermont for design and accessibility; and Perry Richards, Elizabeth Tuck and former employee April Tuck of the human resources department of Middlebury College received the Governor's Award for outstanding effort. Since the GCEPD began presenting awards in 1989, over sixty Vermont businesses and individuals have been honored.

Forms for submitting nominations can be found on the GCEPD website at www.hireus.org. For more information, please contact Melita DeBellis, Executive Coordinator of the GCEPD, at 802-434-6600.

An Opportunity to Earn PHR / SPHR CEU credits!

JAN, the Job Accommodation Network, brings its nationally acclaimed **Accommodation and Compliance Web Training Series** to your computer! The Series unites national experts on job accommodation and disability employment law to provide one-hour training opportunities via Webcasts.

The Accommodation and Compliance Training Series provides a convenient opportunity for human resource managers, compliance officers, disability and diversity managers, and other professionals to discover ways to enhance an organization's ability to accommodate and employ people with disabilities.

Continuing Education Units (CEUs) are available for the training events.

All Webcasts are on the second Tuesday of the month and begin at 2 pm EST.

The 2007 JAN Webcast series includes:

June 12, 2007 -

Workplace Accommodations: A Small Investment Yields Large Return.

July 10, 2007 - ***The Ada at 17: What's Happening with Title I?***

Click [here](#) for more information.

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