

Getting the Job

How GVRA Takes
Clients From
Interview to Hired

April 2018



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Hiring Individuals With Disabilities

By Executive Director Sean T. Casey

“Throughout the job market...”

“In today’s job market...”

“Currently trending in the job market...”

Year after year, we read articles referring to “today’s job market.” And yes, many of these pieces are informative, for over the years and at a continuously faster pace, many facets of our job market have changed, from the tools we use, to the speed of the decision-making loop, the increased diversity of fellow coworkers, to being asked to still perform your job while on vacation with family or friends (Thanks, technology). Yet one thing that has not changed is the anxiety that comes with the job interview process, not just for the candidate, but the hiring manager too. As any employer will tell you, poor hires can be costly and can have repercussions for months if not years to come. How do you read between the lines of the résumé to know if an individual is truly the right match?

Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) assists people with all kinds of disabilities in finding employment. Our role in workforce development is to cultivate a climate in which our clients are seen as the assets they truly are. While disability advocacy—and with it, the American workplace—have come a long way since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, the numbers tell a story that is likely rooted in misconceptions about people with disabilities. In 2016, the U.S. Department of Labor stated that only 27.7 percent of individuals with disabilities between 16 and 64 who considered themselves “in the job market” were employed, as compared to 76.4 percent of their peers. I know one individual — an

incredibly effective Human Resources professional — who says she interviewed for more than 200 jobs before an offer came her way. Even though a former executive with the company where she now works says she is, hands down, the best HR person he ever worked with, she attributes hesitation over her mobility and speech disabilities to the lack of initial bites from employers.

As an employer, you don’t want to miss out on the best (fill in the blank) you’ve ever worked with, but you still have to cover all the bases. Some major areas are covered by the ADA – for example, asking someone if they have a disability is off limits — but there is a gray area. Here are some guides to help you, the hiring manager, navigate the interview effectively and recruit a diverse workforce.

Don’t make assumptions. Everyone does things in life differently, whether it’s making the bed, baking a cake, or performing a work task. You may wonder how you would do your job without your sight, hearing, or the ability to walk. Yet, your job candidate has already developed their own approach. When recruiting a person with a disability, you are also recruiting a problem solver who has tackled barriers successfully and come out on the other side.

Ask the individual. The Census tells us nearly one in five people have disabilities, and many of those conditions are invisible. But sometimes, the disability is obvious, like the need to use a wheelchair. While it’s still illegal to ask the person if they have a disability (no matter how apparent), you can ask if they will be able to perform all the essential functions of the job with or without accommodations. After all, your end game is to hire someone who can do



the work.

Take the opportunity to check

accessibility. The ADA says a lot about how people should be able to access public buildings. While the law is technical in places, accessibility doesn't have to be hard or costly. When working with someone with a physical disability, creating an accessible room may be as simple as ensuring there are no obstacles in the aisle. If you are courting your candidate with a lunch offsite, take a few seconds to check the restaurant's website to be sure there are no embarrassing problems getting in when you show up. These small steps are no reason to be nervous, and they won't cost you anything either.

Relax. Remember, you and your candidate are both human and you're both professional adults. In my experience, disabilities often become invisible to coworkers and friends very quickly. One of my coworkers is a stellar Certified Rehabilitation Counselor. She holds a graduate degree, has spent 16 years on our

team handling a caseload and is also a wife and mom. This colleague also happens to be blind, and she says her coworkers will occasionally bring her a document and ask that she "take a look at this." She doesn't take offense, she says, because she knows her colleagues just see Peggy, not a woman who is blind.

With the high prevalence and wide spectrum of disabilities, you've probably already encountered someone who is disabled at your workplace, and you may not have even noticed it. Casting aside your preconceived notions about difference may just lead to your next top performer.



Sean T. Casey
Executive Director
Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency

NOTE: This originally appeared in the Atlanta Business Chronicle.

BEP Happenings

What's New

By Administrative Operations Coordinator Charlotte Walker

Here's a few things that have happened with the Business Enterprise Program as of late.

Vending — Harvey Gregory was awarded the eastbound and westbound rest area vending on I-16 near the Dublin.

Training — BEP Training just completed its 2018 contract manager's course; There have now been three new blind vendor managers who successfully completed the Contract Managers course, and are now Contract Managers who can bid on cafeteria locations in the program.

Coffee Shop — The Winn Army Hospital Coffee Shop at Ft. Stewart has been remodeled with a completely new look and now offers fresh pastries and desserts (pictured).



It's All in the Numbers

Education and Success For One Client

By Director of Communications/Marketing Robin Folsom

Maria Sotnikova's life has just changed, and it's taken her in directions her wildest hopes previously wouldn't have ventured.

Maria, who emigrated to the U.S. from Russia at five years old, has always been intelligent, determined and career-minded.

A data scientist with the Atlanta Regional Commission, she has impressive academic credentials, which include an undergraduate degree from Georgia Tech's School of Industrial Systems and Engineering, earned with Honors. She also holds dual Masters from her alma mater in Public Policy and City and Regional Planning.

She was missing a few tools though. Maria has a condition that affects her mobility, and she uses a power wheelchair to get to work, get around the office, and do other major daily tasks, both at home and in the community. While the wheelchair works well to help her navigate terrain, her disability also affects range of motion in her arms. For her, draping a sweater around her shoulders, pulling copies off an office printer, and pushing buttons on an elevator were all barriers to independence.

"Elevators were always a problem," she said. "I would literally have to wait for someone else to get on and push the buttons.

While she was already exceling at work, she circled back to her Assistive Workplace Technologist, Gigi Taylor, to discuss ways to further improve her mobility while on the job.

"I came in and said, 'Okay, let's do a walk through, and find some of the things that we can make easier,'" said Gigi. "Show me."

There were a few tasks Maria identified, and most of them were simple things, like turning on a light switch or operating a copier.

After exploring multiple work-arounds, Gigi tapped into technology, knowing she could find a solution that would expand Maria's independence.

Enter the Jaco arm, managed by an Assistive Technology company called Kinova. While the notion of a robotic arm may conjure up images of science fiction and intimidate some, Maria took to its operation with ease. "It was like re-exploring the world," she said.

Gigi was impressed with how quickly Maria used the device, a shiny black piece of equipment affixed to her power chair, with multiple pivots and a touch controller. Gigi said, "I watched her face light up when she turned on the lights in a room. I was happy and relieved when I watched her successfully push elevator buttons and openly abandon the fear of being alone when riding in its cab."

Abe Clark, who works Jaco's manufacturer, told Gigi and Maria that the device works exactly as assistive technology should, assisting you in your ability instead of replacing it."

As Maria manipulated her Jaco to lift a pencil from a counter, she was asked about the biggest thing her device had changed for her.

"My life," Maria replied. "It changed my life. It's just changed everything."





Maria is currently featured in GVRA latest television ad, which will begin running in the next month statewide.

Success! One Client's Story

By CRC David Hodges



Dan Wilson came to GVRA with a story to tell. It consisted of struggle, redemption and, ultimately, triumph. His attitude towards life and his spirit of perseverance is infectious to say the least.

Interested in giving back to his community, Dan wanted to become a peer specialist, working with others to help them improve their own lives. With the help of the Georgia Certified Peer Specialist Project, he was able to achieve this goal.

Not willing to rest on his laurels, Dan continues his training with the help of GVRA in other relevant certifications to further his career and help others who are in struggling in ways to which he is familiar. Dan has worked with Counselor David Hodges and has referred many of his friends to GVRA, talking up the organization to anyone who will listen. His success in the program is the result of his willingness to go above and beyond what is expected of him.

GVRA is a small part of Dan's story, and he is a perfect example of what can happen when a client's determination is matched with his willingness to ask for and receive help when he needs it.



Staff in the Dublin Office
Recently Celebrated
Rehabilitation Counselor
Appreciation Day.

DUBLIN IS

ALL IN!



On the Road Again

Getting Out in the Community

By Service Area 9 Manager Stephanie Woods

In March, staff from Service Delivery Area 9 participated in two community events: the Three Rivers Transition Council Post-Secondary Fair at Southeastern Technical College in Vidalia and the Heart of Georgia Transition Alliance's 4th Annual I CAN Conference at Middle Georgia State University. Both events were geared towards 11th & 12th grade students with disabilities from the 12+ counties served by SDA 9, and they provided opportunities for students, teachers and parents (totaling over 317 in attendance) to meet GVRA staff to learn about services and hear presentations on self-advocacy, speak to a panel of local employers and learn about educational opportunities after high school.

Carmen Cates, of High School High Tech, provided a breakout session on self-advocacy at The Three Rivers Transition Council Post-Secondary Fair while Service Area Manager Stephanie Woods and Team Lead Minnie Lewis hosted a booth at the event's agency fair.

At Thursday's I CAN Conference, Marketing Coordinator Scott Buckner, Career Pathways Specialist Sondra Hudson and Stephanie Woods hosted "So You Think College is Not Right for You?" where options such as Roosevelt Warm Springs, Cave Spring Center and Inclusive Post-Secondary Education were discussed.

Down the hall, the Dublin Unit (e.g. Team Lead Alfred Wheeler, CRC Scott Dekowski, CRC Doris Gilmore, CRC LeQuensha Fredrick, PRC Maria Harmon, CA Kelly Perry, CA Damin Evans, CA Laurie Brown and EC Holly Sapp) hosted "Interview Adventures," which consisted of multiple skits showcasing appropriate and inappropriate behavior at interviews.

Their skits brought levity to common "mistakes" interviewees make while also demonstrating the professional approach which should be taken if those in attendance wanted to land the job.



Get to Know a Legislator

This Month We Feature Steve Henson



Senator Steve Henson is a Democrat who represents Senate District 41 since 2003 and formerly represented Senate District 55 from 1991-1999.

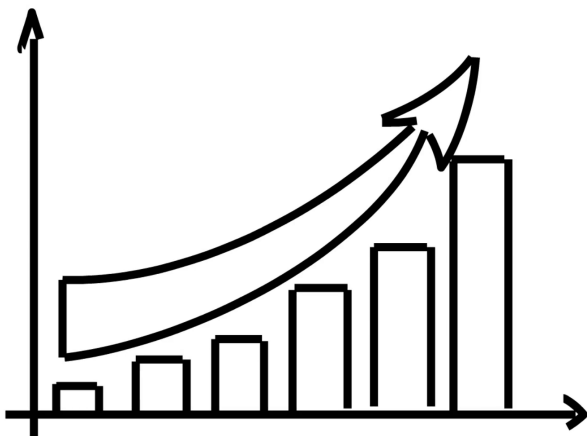
Sen. Henson currently serves as the Minority Leader for the Senate Democratic Caucus

and is the Vice Chairman of the Urban Affairs Committee. He also serves on the Administrative Affairs, Government Oversight, Health and Human Services, Natural Resources and the Environment, Reapportionment and Redistricting, Regulated Industries and Utilities and Rules committees.

Sen. Henson is chair of the DeKalb County Senate Delegation. He has the distinction of being the past chair of the DeKalb Democratic Party.

A DeKalb resident for over thirty years, Sen. Henson graduated from the University of Georgia with a bachelor's degree in Economics.

He is a vocational administrator and teacher at Henson Training Institute and has been an officer and member of numerous community and civic organizations over the years, such as: Tucker Jaycees, Stone Mountain Exchange Club, DeKalb Lung Association, League of Women Voters, PRISM, Georgia Advisory Council for the Mentally Ill, Georgia Epilepsy Board and others.



Studies have shown that hiring individuals with disabilities increases employment retention and can prove a boost to a company's bottom line.



Reaching Out

Employment Services and Georgia Pacific

Employment Services staff gave a presentation in early April to a room full of HR professionals with Georgia Pacific, and the message was clear: GVRA clients can help your business.

"We're here to help you," said Assistant Director of Employment Services Inger Neal to the full room at the company's downtown Atlanta office. "And we want—when we're done—for you to know you have a good return on your investment. We're here to make sure that happens."

Return on investment (or ROI as it's known in business parlance) can come in many forms, Inger said, but what GVRA specializes in is placing clients who have the skills necessary to help businesses succeed and grow their bottom line.

In the same vein, Employment Services staff work with businesses both big and small to optimize potential tax credits and other financial incentives for which they might qualify.

Assistant Director of Student Employment

Services at Roosevelt Warm Springs Tiffany Hudson gave an overview of the services offered at RWS and the Cave Spring Center. She said the residential campuses work to give students both independent living skills and training, which can range from understanding general office tasks to certifications as a certified nursing assistant or a welder or a robotics operator.

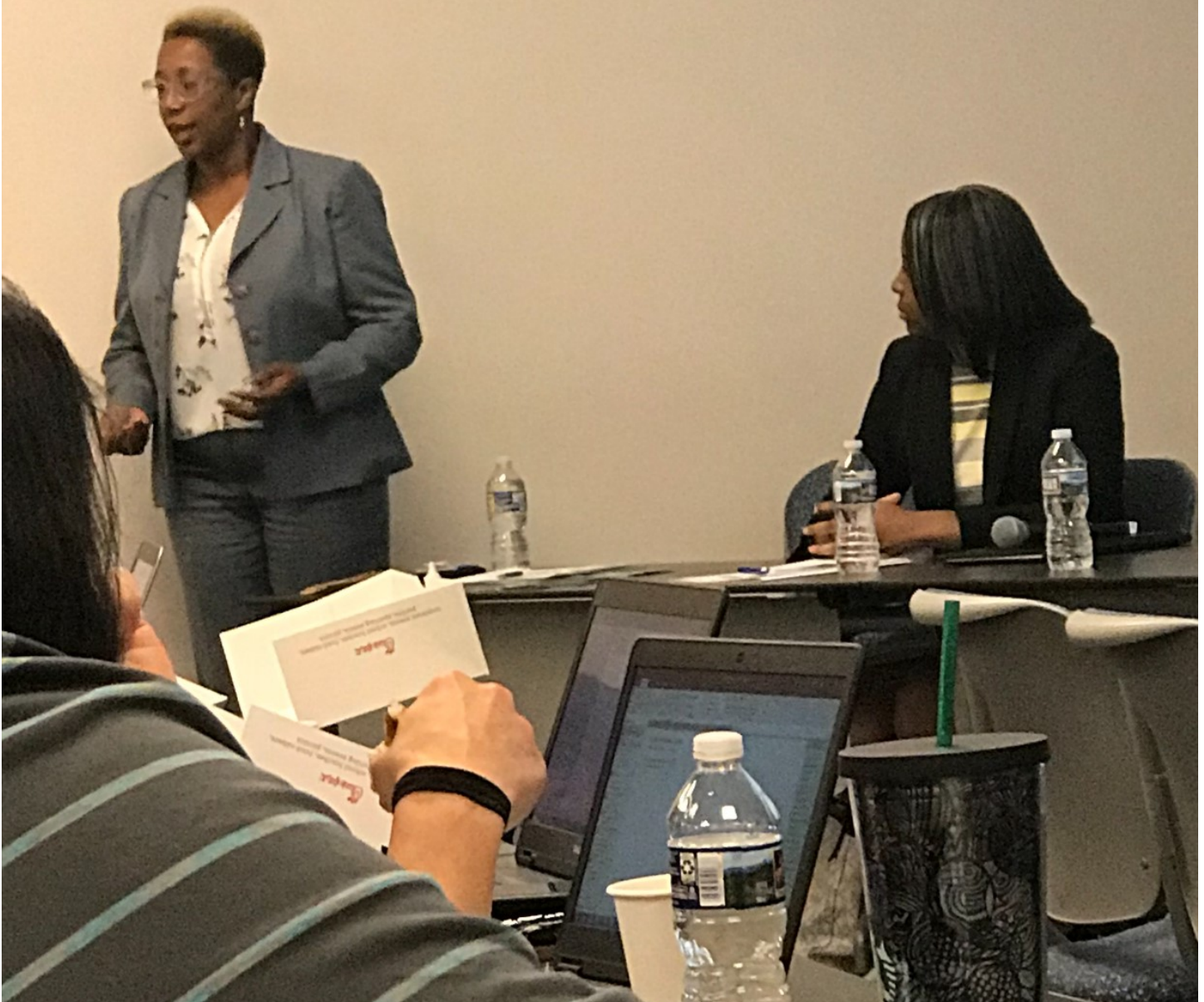
"We're all about making sure students have the skills they need to get ahead, to go out and get a job that they can do well," Tiffany said.

At the end of the day, Inger said, the work GVRA does benefits both employer and client, and the organization is working to educate business leaders about the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities.

"Everyone is an individual and everyone has skills and abilities, and there is a job out there for everyone," she said. "People want to get out into the workforce and we're set on making that a reality."



"Everyone is an individual and everyone has skills and abilities, and there is a job out there for everyone." ~ Inger Neal



A Real Life Working Wonder

Meet Chris Gore

By Director of Communications/Marketing Robin Folsom

He's kind of a jack-of-all-trades when it comes to making things at Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB). He's good at communicating to the people he works with and his managers. And he's appreciative of his job, a trait that isn't always prominent in the U.S. workforce.

You first met Chris Gore in March's newsletter. A former football and baseball player whose Retinitis Pigmentosis later took away much of his vision (and the ability to drive his prized Chevy Pickup), he has been a part of the GIB team for three years.

But Chris doesn't want sympathy, and when you meet him, the last thing that crosses your mind is to feel sorry for him. What will cross your mind is how any employer is

lucky to have a guy like Chris.

He has the skills. He can screen-print, manufacture pillows and paper products, and knows how to operate a litany of machinery most of us who have never worked in a factory don't understand.

What an employer would likely covet most is Chris's attitude. When we initially featured him in this publication, he told us, "I like learning new things. I always tell people, if there's something to do, just tell me."

Congratulations, Chris, on receiving the Georgia Enterprises Working Wonder Award.



RWS Honors Staff

Time to Celebrate

Kathy Yates was named leader of the year, and Holly Flournoy was named employee of the year during the annual Employee Recognition Luncheon at Roosevelt Warm Springs on March 20.

Yates works as manager of the counseling and case management department.

"Kathy provides unwavering support to her staff," her nomination reads. "She is a role model with an empathetic ability, as she has held the role of counselor and understands the demands often faced. She challenges us to achieve personal growth and supports our desire to further our education. At the same time, she understands the importance of family in our lives and is caring and genuinely concerned when one of our staff faces a family crisis. She is always willing to listen and provide heartfelt support."

"Kathy encourages risk taking in the development of new and innovative services to improve program outcomes and contribute to the success of our students," the nomination continues. "She ensures our department goals align with the RWS goals and GVRA goals to provide the best possible service to our students. In the eyes of her staff, Kathy exemplifies our leadership philosophy and expectations in her dedication to her department, to the mission of RWS and to the success of GVRA."

The employee of the year, Holly Flournoy, works as program associate in the Residential & Campus life Department where she helps in numerous ways.

According to her nomination, she covers classes when instructors are absent, staffs the dorm office when necessary, supervises the students that choose the department

office as a work site and keeps the orientation week schedule, while at the same time performing all the other functions needed to support a busy department.

"Holly treats others with respect and acceptance," her nomination reads. "She will often stop in the middle of doing something to help a frustrated co-worker with some computer or software issue. She makes you feel like she truly wants to help you and that it is not an imposition on her time. Consequently, our department members know if we have a question, Holly will more than likely have the answer, and if she doesn't, she will try to find it out. We rely daily on her excellent memory and efficient organizational skills."

The Roosevelt Warm Springs Development Fund sponsors the Employee Recognition Luncheon each year, continuing a tradition started years ago when RWS was still known as the Georgia Warm Springs Foundation. Lee Brinkley Bryan, Director of Residential Programs, served as master of ceremonies at the event and GVRA Deputy Director Kevin Harris delivered the keynote address.

In addition to the two awards above, service pins were presented to the following staff members:

30 years: Rufus Braddy

20 years: Joel Armstrong and Steve Hardnett

15 years: Lynn Arndt, Bonnie Cook, Jewel Grantham, Vergena Ogletree and Octavia Martin.

10 years: Linda Biggs, Tiffany Hudson, Shannon Hutcherson, Jewell Kissun,



Stephanie Mahone, Oscar Phillips, Aaron Stewart and Gwynnell Vessell.

5 years: Logan Brakefield, Lee Brinkley Bryan, Jonathon Buxton, Dell Lawson, Janet Messerly, Morgan Reese, Patrick Smith, Kaitlin Wells and Debra Whitten.
The other nominees for the Leader of the

Year Award were Jorge Navarro, Mitchell Sanders and Lois Williams.

The other nominees for the Employee of the Year Award were Megan Hunt, Jeff Goodin and Chris Franklin.



From top left and clockwise: 15 and 20 year RWS honrees, 10 year honorees and (below) five year honorees



Overcoming Obstacles And Getting a Degree

From Thomas University Communications

In May, Feliciano Francisco-Gonzalez will graduate from Thomas University with a Bachelor of Social Work degree.

Before enrolling at TU in January 2017, Francisco-Gonzalez studied at other schools and tried other majors.

"I was lost," he said. "I really didn't know what I wanted to do."

For a while Francisco-Gonzalez thought he wanted to be a teacher. Then he considered becoming an occupational therapist until a professor told him that his disability could be a safety issue. (Francisco-Gonzalez is legally blind.) He then attended a large university but found the environment wasn't a good fit.

Then his sister suggested that he consider social work. It seemed like a great fit for Francisco-Gonzalez's caring personality and his desire to link people with the services they need.

"When I started in social work, I realized that I had found my niche," he said.

Francisco-Gonzalez lives in Cairo and graduated from Cairo High School in 2007. For eight years, he worked as a sales associate in the paint department at the Cairo Walmart. His department manager was amazed that Francisco-Gonzalez never let his visual impairment get in the way of doing his job. Francisco-Gonzalez was able to mix paint, put up freight and keep the department organized.

"He picked up everything real fast," said Inita Haynes, Francisco-Gonzalez's supervisor and Manager of the Hardware Department at the Cairo Walmart. "He never said what he can't do. He's going to do it anyway. When he does it, he does it well."

Haynes said she was impressed by Francisco-Gonzalez's drive to improve himself.

"I want him to follow his dream, and I know he can become whatever he wants to be," she said. "He wanted to become somebody, and he wanted to go back to school. I kept pushing him to do it because he's a very smart person."

Francisco-Gonzalez was born with Stargardt's Disease, a form of macular dystrophy that severely reduced his vision when he was a child. Now he uses technology to make text and images larger so that he can see them.

As a student at TU, Francisco-Gonzalez found professors willing to work with him so that he could overcome any barriers that might hinder him from obtaining his BSW. Professors would record lectures so that he could listen to them later and provide him with files of their lecture notes so that he could increase the text to a readable size.

"They are always willing to accommodate me and always push me along when I think I can't do it," he said about his professors.

He also worked with Dr. Pauline Patrick, TU's Director of Disability Services, who helped enable Francisco-Gonzalez to accomplish his classwork. He credits all the TU professors who taught him for their willingness to accommodate his low vision, especially social work professors Bill Milford and Dr. Susan Fowler.

"There's just this sense that TU professors really care about you, and they want you to succeed," he said. "I see that in every professor whose class I've taken here. Your professors are walking with you, not holding your hand but working with you and really encouraging you."

Bill Milford, Chair of the TU Division of



Social Work, said, "Felix is the kind of student who makes teaching a pleasure. He comes by for office hours to discuss items of interest posted during the week and demonstrates his mastery of the concepts by testing them out in his own life. His attention to detail, ability to explore questions in a non-judgmental fashion, and great sense of humor make him an awesome social worker. Being around students like him, who experience such wonderful personal and professional growth during their time at Thomas University, help me to feel continually energized as an instructor."

Outside of TU he also worked with Carlotta Hudson, a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor, at Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency. Hudson, who's also a TU alumna, made such a difference for Francisco-Gonzalez that now he's considering the possibility of eventually working with the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency.

"Georgia Vocational Rehab has made a big impact in my life, and I want to give back," he said.

This semester Francisco-Gonzalez is completing a field placement by working with Dan Salveter, a licensed clinical social worker at Bishop Hall Charter School.

"I like working with him because he's very

detailed," Francisco-Gonzalez said. "Mr. Salveter has been a great mentor. He's really good at telling me what I need to do to improve and what I'm doing well. He provides great feedback."

Each week Francisco-Gonzalez meets with Bishop Hall students ranging from 8th graders through 12th graders to discuss their progress toward graduating high school.

"If they're facing obstacles, we come up with a plan to help them graduate," he said. "If they're dealing with personal issues, we help connect them with the services they need."

Francisco-Gonzalez also leads the students in various exercises to emphasize social skills development. A particular game he plays with his students is "the werewolf game." This game teaches students that every action they make affects their peers in a positive or negative way.

"It's a game, but at the same time, it's teaching them that their decisions dictate what happens," he explained.

After graduating in May, Francisco-Gonzalez has decided to continue his social work education by pursuing a master's degree in the field.



Made in Georgia

The Georgia Grown Brand Takes Off

Governor Nathan Deal and other dignitaries were on hand at a March 20 press conference to announce the new line of Georgia Grown t-shirts, produced entirely by Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB).


"Our state has so much to offer and the capacity to participate in the national and international economies at a competitive level. We boast an immense amount of natural and agricultural resources as well as a workforce capable of meeting demand," said GVRA Executive Director Sean T. Casey. "GIB's product line is impressive, making T-shirts out of Georgia Grown cotton and screen printing the Georgia Grown brand on a full line of other merchandise. The people who make that production line possible are hard working members of their community who are contributing to the economy, supporting their families and fully participating in society."

The 100 percent cotton shirts are sourced from South Georgia and ginned at Osceola

Cotton Company in Irwin County, Georgia.

"With more than \$73 billion in economic output each year, agribusiness is the largest industry here in the No. 1 state for business," Gov. Deal said. "An important part of that industry, which is directly tied to this Georgia Grown project, is our cotton sector, as almost 20 percent of all American cotton comes from Georgia. With this project, we are recognizing the farmers, growers and raisers who are ultimately responsible for so much other business all along the farm-to-consumer supply chain and I am proud to stand alongside Commissioner Black in support of this campaign. All the best things are Georgia Grown, so I look forward to seeing these shirts on citizens across the state as we continue to be the No. 1 state for business and the best place to call home."



A photograph showing Governor Nathan Deal and GIB Co-Director Luis Narimatsu shaking hands. Governor Deal is on the left, wearing a dark blue suit, white shirt, and red tie. Luis Narimatsu is on the right, wearing a dark grey suit, light blue shirt, and red tie with white polka dots. He is also wearing sunglasses and holding a white cane. In the background, several men are standing, some wearing light blue shirts with "OSCEOLA COUNTY" logos. The text "Governor Nathan Deal and GIB Co-Director Luis Narimatsu shakes hands at a press conference in March announcing Georgia Grown merchandise." is overlaid on the bottom half of the image.

Governor Nathan Deal and GIB
Co-Director Luis Narimatsu
shakes hands at a press
conference in March
announcing Georgia Grown
merchandise.

The Chicken and the Gig

Students Get to Work

By Counselor Assistant Sandra McBride

The Statesboro Vocational Rehabilitation Office continues to make the impossible look like just another day of fun! Mr. Mark Bland, Corporate Director of Human Resources for Claxton Poultry, reached out to the High School Work Based Learning Coordinators in Bulloch, Evans, Bryan, Tattnall and Evans County in search of 40 to 50 students who might be interested in working part-time at the plant.

The employment need is immediate, and the department would be developed only for High School students with two Claxton Poultry supervisors assigned to their area. The pay is \$9.50 an hour with the opportunity to get a \$1 per hour raise with perfect attendance.

With this information, Morgot Bragg, WBL-Coordinator at Statesboro High School, got to work. She began coordinating meetings and plant tours strategizing the employment plan to ensure optimum success.

During the initial conversation with Mr. Bland, he said that the tasks associated with this department would be consistent and relatively simple. With this in mind, it is his hope that making the shifts four hours per day would allow the students to stay focused and not get burned out. Claxton Poultry takes great pride in employing people with disabilities, he said, and this represents an opportunity for non-traditional work-based learning.

Statesboro Vocational Rehabilitation Office Team Lead John Cheek and Counselor Assistant Sandra McBride both accepted the invitation to assist with the planning of this exciting employment opportunity.

Vocational Rehabilitation was ready to help

students complete the employment application, arrange transportation, and VR would provide a job coach. Without this assistance, the students would not be able to work.

The first Claxton Poultry employee orientation was held on March 21. Of the 44 student workers attending, six were students with disabilities. John Cheek was on hand at Claxton Poultry during the orientation to assist students in filling out new hire paperwork, and students began work the next day.

The students have had only positive things to say about their work experiences at Claxton Poultry.

Roughly 10 more students with disabilities have inquired about working at Claxton Poultry since hearing from their peers how much fun it is, and Vocational Rehabilitation will meet monthly to fill the new job positions as Claxton Poultry lists them.

This employment opportunity is permanent, and upon graduation, students can elect to move to full-time status. Claxton offers excellent health and retirement benefits. Every employee is given the same opportunity to advance within the company.

Without the support of Vocational Rehabilitation, many of the students with disabilities say they would not have been able to go to work on the Claxton Poultry High School line, and this is an exciting opportunity for everyone involved.



Conference Life

GVRA Presence at GA AER

By Assistant Director of Blind Services Shirley Robinson

GVRA staff recently played a part in the annual Georgia Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (GA AER) Conference.

This year's conference was held in early March at Tools for Life at Georgia Tech. More than 15 agencies and service providers in Georgia came together to learn and discuss issues specific to blind consumers.

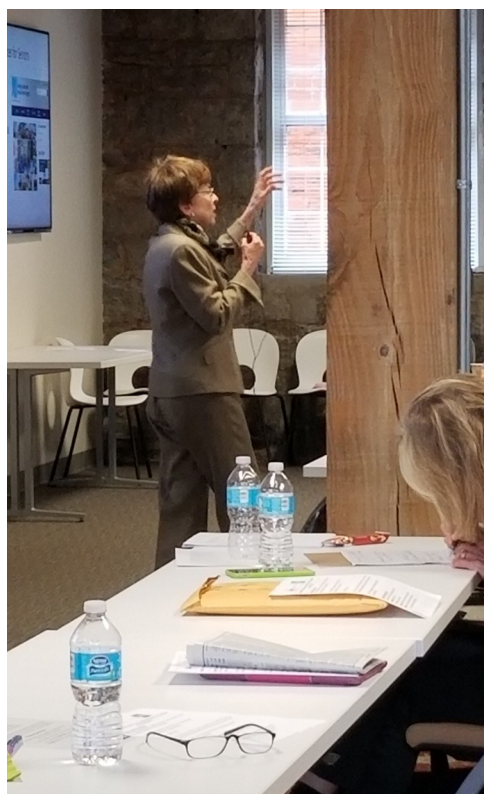
GVRA was well represented by staff from the Blind and Visually Impaired (BVI) Sensory Team, BVI dedicated and designated staff, as well as counselors from E-3 and the Business Enterprise Program.

Denine Woodson, Director of Deaf and Blind Services for VR (pictured bottom left), and Kay McGill, Program Manager for Project Independence (pictured bottom

right), shared updates from the BVI Sensory Team, and Charlotte Young and Kathryn Edger from E-3 presented on Pre-Employment Transition Services and special projects at the Georgia Academy for the Blind.

GVRA staff not only had the opportunity to learn and network with providers, but they were also able to earn 12 hours towards their professional development credits. GA AER is already working on their 2019 conference, and they are hoping to grow their relationship with GVRA.

GA AER is a professional association, made up of blind service providers including Teachers for the Visually Impaired, Orientation & Mobility Specialists, Vision Rehabilitation Therapists and Rehabilitation Counselors.



A Labor of Love

Edythe Hendrix Celebrates 50 Years

By Director of Communications/Marketing Robin Folsom

In 1968, U.S. Soldiers were fighting in Vietnam. We lost Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Senator Robert F. Kennedy, both of whom were assassinated. Voters elected Richard Nixon president. The first Boeing 747 flight took to the skies. And the average cost of a brand new car was \$2,822.00.

1968 is also the year Vocational Rehabilitation, then a part of the Georgia Department of Education, hired Edythe Hendrix, who had been one of Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) Zack Tatum's clients. Edythe was hired with the title Clerk I, though she would hold a number of positions over the next fifty years. Her assigned location inside Grady Hospital was only a short walk from the spot where she works now, as an IT Business Analyst in GVRA Administration at the Floyd Towers. Trying to break into the workforce, she was armed with an Associate's Degree from business school, but she wasn't sure how to get her foot in the door at a time when people with disabilities were overlooked more often than not.

A case of measles when Edythe was just 18 months old had cost her part of her hearing, and she had worn a hearing aid since she was 11. She was 19 when she walked into Zack Tatum's office.

"He was the first person who asked me what I wanted to do," Edythe recalls, sitting in her fifth floor workspace at the Towers. "I told him, 'I want to be in business, but I can't do it.' And I'll never forget, he looked at me and said, 'Why not?'"

Edythe never did forget. She retired once, but the appetite for a part of the VR process

was still there. "I felt like I owed it to rehab because I was a rehab client," Edythe says with a smile, and shrugs. "Plus, I don't want to just sit at the house all the time. I like going to work. There's always something to learn."

Of course, in Edythe's case, there's plenty of teaching too. "Edythe taught me so much of what I know," says her Business Applications coworker, Deidre Jackson. "And there are some things about her job only Edythe knows."

And with all those decades in VR, Edythe has seen a lot. She recalls that women didn't hold counselor positions when she came on board. "They were able to be counselor aides but not counselors. I believe it was 1969 or 1970 when the first two women counselor aides were promoted to counselor."

She also remembers trends and developments that have influenced service delivery over the years. "I remember that the Supported Employment Programs and Head Injury Programs when they were first developed on the national level had a big impact on the services that were provided and continue to be provided at the state level."

With all the developments she's seen in the field comes a certain serenity and an ability to process change calmly. "I've seen most things happen, and some things more than once," Edythe laughs.

But, she says, the foundation remains the same. "Your core is still there. Just keep remembering, your main thing is the client, and every client that walks in the door is



different. You can have ten different people with the exact same disability, and every single one of them will be different."

While Edythe has never been a counselor herself, she has always focused on the client in each of her roles. "When I worked for counselors, they explained the rationale that was used in making decisions to benefit the client. When I worked for managers of the Policy and Procedures Unit, the expectation was that I would not only type the policy manual. I would understand the policy, where it came from and what it meant. Every move I made from unit to unit and every person I worked with increased knowledge of all the parts that make up the agency."

Outside of the office, Edythe's passions carry over to her involvement in the Georgia Rehabilitation Association (GRA). She served as Secretary for a year and as a board member for three. She was also President, Vice President, Secretary, Board Member, and chair of various Committees in the Georgia Association of Rehabilitation Secretaries Association. And, there's her family, her cats, needlework, sewing, passion for reading, and a roommate with whom she became friends early in her VR career.

With all those activities to preoccupy her time, why not enjoy retirement? Edythe replies with a smile, "I still find fun in what I'm doing."



Edythe Hendrix, who recently celebrated 50 years with the state is pictured here in the white blouse.



Calendar of Events

Make Sure to Save the Date

Autism Awareness Resource Fair

April 21, 2018
1331 Alexander Street
Columbus 31904

Autism Walk

April 29, 2018
Atlantic Station, 1371 Market Street
Atlanta, GA 30363

Financial Inclusion Summit: Assuring People with Disabilities Access to Mainstream Financial Services

April 30, 2018
Shepherd Center, 2020 Peachtree Road
Atlanta, GA 30309

NAAAP Diversity Career Fair

August 23-25
InterContinental Buckhead Atlanta
3315 Peachtree Road Northeast
Atlanta, GA 30326

Thank You

This newsletter is always a team effort. It wouldn't be possible without so many contributions from coworkers, providers and clients. It's truly a testament to the great community we have at GVRA and in Georgia.

So, as always, thank you to everyone who makes this newsletter a reality every month. We couldn't have done it without you.

That said, this newsletter belongs to everyone who enjoys it, and we want to hear from you.

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Do you have suggestions about how to improve this newsletter or stories that people might find interesting? Do you have events for the calendar or know someone who make a good profile? These are all things you can submit to GVRA Communications Manager John P. Boan at john.boan@gvs.ga.gov.

Everyone is encouraged to submit content and help us make this newsletter as good as it possibly can be.

Printed at Roosevelt Warm Springs

