



Media Release

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Woodruff County man regains eyesight, wins service award

Maurice Buirts of Augusta has been an Emergency Medical Technician for 33 years in Woodruff County. He treats patients “as though they are family members – grandmothers, sisters, brothers.” He feels his work as an EMT is his “life’s calling” and that giving back to his community is most important.

His career could have ended when he was diagnosed with primary open angle glaucoma. He was in imminent danger of losing his eyesight before his eye doctor referred him to the DHS Division of Services for the Blind for help. DSB paid for his eye surgery and treatments. “If it wasn’t for my counselor Mr. McCoy and the Division of Services for the Blind, I wouldn’t be here (at work). It helped me a whole lot. I didn’t even know this organization existed before I was referred to it,” he said. Buirts’ eyesight has been totally restored and his DSB case is closed.

Because of his caring commitment and success in his job, Buirts has been named as the area’s Consumer of the Year by DSB. He is one of only 13 people in Arkansas who will receive an area award. An overall state winner will be named at the end of the year.

His employer, Woodruff County Ambulance Service, based in McCrory and owned by Devin Barker, will be recognized as the area Employer of the Year by DSB. The award presentation will be made at noon on October 11 at the ambulance service headquarters in McCrory.

Buirts said “it’s real good” to be nominated for the award, but he feels humble about being recognized and was surprised his work in a small town was noticed. “I’m happy, and I’m proud. I feel honored.” Buirts was chosen for the area including Craighead, Clay, Lawrence, Greene, Poinsett, Woodruff, and Jackson counties.

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Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Kenneth McCoy said he nominated Buirts because of his compassion for others and his dedication to his work. “Mr. Buirts works closely with local police departments, nursing homes, and other medical providers in the Woodruff County area. He has to be recertified every two years with continuing education training to assist with saving a person’s life.”

Buirts said assistance from DSB meant he could continue the career he’s had all his life. “It meant I could keep on working. I love my work. It’s all I’ve done since I got out of high school.”

He also married his wife, Antoinette, just out of high school. “I have a good, strong wife. She’s very patient and understanding (about his work schedule).” He’s at the ambulance company Monday through Thursday and home the rest of the week. He never takes a vacation. “I guess I’m just a workaholic.” They have three grown children.

Buirts worked for a hospital-based ambulance service for 10 years. When the hospital closed, he joined the private ambulance company and has been with Woodruff County Ambulance Service for 23 years. He’s now a supervisor, but still goes on calls as a certified EMT.

“If anybody deserves an award, he does,” said employee Rhonda Jones. “He helps all of us. You couldn’t ask for a better supervisor. He’s always there for us. We all love him.”

This is the fourth year that DSB has given Consumer of the Year awards to recognize individuals who have managed their rehabilitation plans, gained marketable skills, secured good jobs, and become role models for others. At the end of the year, the DSB Board will select an overall state winner from the area winners who were nominated. The announcement will be made at the board meeting Dec. 9, and will be followed by a reception.

DSB provides vocational rehabilitation services to individuals who are blind or severely visually impaired and whose goal is successful employment. The division also serves youth and older blind individuals. For information about DSB’s programs and services, call 1-800-960-9270 or 501-682-5463 or visit the DSB website at <http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dsb/Pages/default.aspx>.