

Media Release

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Fort Smith woman who's blind receives state achievement award

Pamela Rae Armstrong of Fort Smith has been named the state's outstanding Consumer of the Year by the Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB). She was chosen from among 13 nominees from around the state.

Armstrong is a Licensed Vending Facility Manager, under the federal Randolph-Sheppard

Program, which gives priority to specifically trained small business operators who are blind.

Armstrong, the other nominees and their employers were recognized at an award presentation following the DSB Board meeting December 12 at the Holiday Inn Presidential in Little Rock.

Armstrong, who went blind due to Histoplasmosis in her late 30's, went through extensive training to become a vendor and passed tests given by the Department of Health and DSB. "I wanted to work," said Armstrong. "I feel alive again. I feel like I'm doing something. You just can't give up. You make choices, whether you want to sit around and be sad or do something with your life." Armstrong is a vending stand manager in the State Office Building in Fort Smith,

The Vending Facility Program is operated through the Randolph-Sheppard Act, originally passed in 1936, to create entrepreneurial opportunities for people who are blind through the operation of food



From the left is Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Tina Shores, state DSB Consumer of the Year Pamela Armstrong, and DSB board members Dick Walker and Basil

and vending service businesses located on any federal property. Congress expanded the act in 1974, to include the operation of cafeterias. DSB locates the sales site; initially equips and stocks the facility; maintains the equipment; trains the vendor; and provides oversight and record keeping.

Other nominees and their employers included: Byron Todd of Fayetteville, a Licensed Vending Facility Manager; David “Dave” Gentry of Mountain Home, a self-employed dive shop owner and scuba diving instructor; Debra Cole of Hot Springs, a certified nursing assistant in the behavioral health unit at Lakewood Convalescence Center; Keith Clark of Paragould, store manager of Hibbett Sports; Kimberly Finney of Camden, a teacher with the Camden Fairview School District; Larry Stroud of Cave City, associate editor and a columnist for the Batesville Daily Guard newspaper; Louise McKoy of Little Rock, a call center specialist with Verizon Wireless; Lucas Harder of Little Rock, an attorney with the Arkansas School Boards Association; Sandra J. Wilson of De Queen, a psychological examiner and owner of Transitions Psychological Services PLLC; Shana Thurmond of Little Rock, a security officer with Guardsmark Security; Sonya Miller of West Memphis, operator of an in-home day care; and Thomas Hill Jr. of Pine Bluff, a maintenance crew member at Wal-Mart.

This is the seventh 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.

DSB provides vocational rehabilitation services to adults 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, visit the DSB website at <http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dsb/Pages/default.aspx> or call 1-800-960-9270, 501-682-5463, or TDD 501-682-0093.