

Media Release

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Fayetteville man who's blind earns achievement award



From the left are Vending Stand Operator Byron Todd, DSB Area Field Supervisor Tina Shelby, and Fayetteville Lions Club President Mary Tomlinson. Byron Todd received the area's outstanding Consumer of the Year achievement award from the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind during yesterday's Lions Club meeting.

Byron Todd, a Vending Stand Operator at the Veteran's Affairs Hospital in Fayetteville, has been named as an area Consumer of the Year by the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB).

Because of his determination to overcome adversity, serve others, and succeed at work, DSB Area Field Supervisor Tina Shelby nominated him for the achievement award.

"Mr. Todd enjoys serving the hospital staff and the veterans and their families who come into the facility for services. By observation, he is a perfect fit for this type of setting; he gets along with everyone and has a great personality," said Shelby. "He is a very humble man."

Todd, who was born blind, is one of only 13 people in Arkansas who will receive an area award and was chosen from the area including two of Arkansas' most populous counties,

Washington and Benton, said Shelby.

The award presentation was made at the noon meeting of the Fayetteville Lions Club, held at the Guest House International Inn and Suites on June 25.

Todd has had the vending stand since July 2013, and sells pre-packaged foods and drinks. Todd was working as a licensed massage therapist when the former vending stand owner told him he was moving out-of-state and suggested Todd takeover his vending stand location.

Todd studied the manuals for the vending program for four weeks and went to Fort Smith for three weeks of one-on-one training with the vending stand operator there. He then successfully completed training and testing in Little Rock.

“Byron’s a real character. He messes with everybody. He’s really happy to be a vendor and be working. He’s self-motivated and wants to work,” said Scott Murphy, DSB Administrative Analyst, who trained Todd.

“If you can’t laugh, you’ve got a problem. A lot of people around here (the hospital) need a laugh, and I try to help them with that,” said Todd. “I like dealing with people, giving them some encouragement or making them laugh.”

DSB operates the Vending Facility Program through the Randolph-Sheppard Act, originally passed in 1936, to create entrepreneurial opportunities for people who are blind through the operation of food and vending service businesses located on any federal property. Congress expanded the act in 1974, to include the operation of cafeterias. There are currently 18 vending facility sites in Arkansas.

DSB locates the sales site; initially equips and stocks the facility; maintains the equipment; trains the vendor; and provides oversight and record keeping. DSB bought a talking calculator for Todd’s business.

Todd said he appreciates DSB for the services it provided. DSB paid his tuition for massage therapy school; provided job placement services; taught him independent living skills and how to travel using a white cane; and provided the vending facility opportunity. DSB connected him with resources, such as audio books from the Library for the Blind, Arkansas Information Reading Services (AIRS), Newline, voter registration, accessible voting, and consumer organizations, like the National Federation of the Blind and the American Council of the Blind.

“Music has been the most important part of my life,” Todd said. “I sang professionally since I was age 12.” Todd sang with a barbershop quartet while he was still in junior high school. As an adult, he performed in Branson, Eureka Springs, and various states. He has recorded and sung in Nashville, including at the Grand Ole Opry. A test demo his manager sent to countries in Europe was doing well and his singing career was just getting off the ground when his manager died and he lost all those contacts. Transportation was also a barrier to getting to auditions, rehearsals, and performances. Todd still enjoys music in his leisure time and said he’s satisfied in his current career.

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. An overall state winner will be selected at the end of the year.

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.