

Media Release

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Rodeo queen regains vision, earns achievement award



From the left are DSB Representative Sherrie Walston-Friday, area Consumer of the Year Mary Hicks, and De Queen Lions Club president Shelia Wilson. Hicks was presented with an achievement award from the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind at a meeting of the Lions Club.

Mary Ann Hicks of De Queen, a competitive barrel-racer and a self-employed cosmetologist, has been named the area's outstanding Consumer of the Year by the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB).

DSB Area Field Supervisor Lou Talley nominated her for the achievement award because of her determination to overcome adversity and succeed at work. Hicks has been a cosmetologist for 40 years. In addition to working from her home, she goes to the local nursing home for appointments.

Hicks has been barrel racing since she was sixteen years old. "It's fun. I'm going to do it as long as I can," she said. Barrel racing is a rodeo event in which a horse and rider attempt to complete a pattern around barrels, competing against other riders for the fastest time. Hicks has taught her grand-daughter the sport and she also competes in events.

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Hicks is one of only 13 people in Arkansas who received an area award and was selected from the area that includes Miller, Pike, Little River, Sevier, Howard, Nevada, Hempstead, and Lafayette Counties.

The award was presented to Hicks at the noon meeting of the De Queen Lions Club at the Fat Chances Buffet and Catering on January 5.

Hicks said she had sought DSB services because her vision had worsened and she could no longer manage with wearing eyeglasses and contacts simultaneously. Her doctor said it was necessary to remove cataracts to save her vision. DSB paid for her surgery and related medical treatment. "I'm very grateful," Hicks said. "You don't know how you miss your sight until it's gone. DSB is a lifesaver really."

"Mrs. Hicks had worked many years in this industry (cosmetology)," said Talley. "This lady sought assistance in order to remain employed."

Hicks and her husband Chuck have two grown sons and five grandchildren. They attend cowboy church in De Queen and at rodeo events when they're away. Her husband, a retired truck driver and rodeo bulldogger, (also known as a steer wrestler) is now a rodeo hazer. Hicks explained that when the steer is released from the chute, the hazer rockets his horse out of the box and keeps the steer in line for the bulldogger to catch and throw down. The couple enjoys their rodeo life together.

This is the eighth 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.