



Media Release

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Batesville woman who's visually impaired earns achievement award

Renee Meeler of Batesville, who is visually impaired, has been named the area's outstanding Consumer of the Year by the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB).

Meeler is employed as a Program Eligibility Supervisor with DHS Division of County Operations Access Arkansas Processing Center in Batesville. She was involved in the center's inception four years ago.

DSB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Darline Tucker nominated her for the achievement award because of her determination to overcome adversity and succeed at work. "Mrs. Meeler has worked in one capacity or another with DHS for the past 27 years, which is an exemplary accomplishment in my opinion and serves as a testament to her impressive work ethic and dedication."

Meeler and her employer were recognized at the noon meeting of the Kiwanis Club of Batesville on May 29, at the First Baptist Church Annex. Her employer has been named as an outstanding business partner for its commitment to promoting the employment of persons with vision impairment.

Meeler is one of only 13 people in Arkansas who will receive an area award and was selected from an area that includes Independence, Izard, Stone, Cleburne, Fulton, White, and Sharp Counties.

Meeler said her vision loss "was very sudden and pretty traumatic," starting in her left eye and three months later affecting both eyes. She was diagnosed with Optic Neuropathy, which is a progressive, genetic condition that affects blood flow to the optic nerve. She experienced a loss of central vision. Meeler said she's diabetic, which can affect vision.

Meeler, her employer, and DSB worked in partnership to arrange work accommodations she needed to succeed in her career. "DSB went above and beyond to make it easier to do my job and continue to work," Meeler said, explaining she needed to be able to see the computer screen in order to

read cases and review employees' work. DSB put Zoom Text software on her computer and provided a large computer monitor, a desk lamp, and magnifiers. "Without the aids on the computer, I would not be able to work."

"Getting services has been such a blessing," she said. Although Meeler had worked in the same building as DSB staff, she said, "I didn't realize all they do. I'd already been out of pocket \$3,000 (in co-pays for medical expenses related to vision) before I found out about DSB services." DSB started paying her copays for eye doctor appointments; bought her sunglasses and low-vision aids; and taught her independent living skills. At the employer's request, DSB did a presentation at the workplace about vision and agency services.

"The name Division of Services for the Blind is deceiving," Meeler said. "I knew I wasn't blind, so I didn't think they had services for someone like me."

Meeler is a member of Compass Church in Batesville. She and her husband Roger have two grown children. Meeler said she doesn't have time for hobbies because, "all my spare time is devoted to my new granddaughter, Kinsley."

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. 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.