



Media Release

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For Immediate Release

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Blytheville woman who's visually impaired serves others, wins area award

Public service is a way of life for Martha Washington of Blytheville, who is severely visually impaired. She has been a Police Dispatcher for 15 years and is a former school secretary. She is also a full-time college student majoring in sociology and uses her knowledge of resources to assist and advocate for other people who are visually impaired.

Because of her determination and service to her community, Washington has been named as the area's Consumer of the Year by the Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB). She 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.

"I don't think I'm worthy. I'm happy to be chosen, but there are so many other people out there," Washington said.

The award presentation will be made at the noon meeting of the Blytheville Lions Club at the Blytheville Country Club on August 30. Her employer, the Blytheville Police Department, will be recognized as the area DSB Employer of the Year.

"Mrs. Washington does not let her visual impairment hinder her work or her life. She is a true inspiration to others," said her Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Tonya Wear.

Washington was working two full-time jobs when she first contacted DSB for services. She needed visual aids to assist her in her work as a school secretary and a police dispatcher and as a full-time college student, she said. Eventually her busy schedule put too much stress on her Multiple Sclerosis (MS), and she had to quit her job full-time job at the school. Various eye diseases are relatively common in people with MS.

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Washington is a substitute teacher. She also does volunteer work with Alzheimer's patients at the nursing home and is the youth director at New Bethel Missionary Baptist Church. She also holds a district youth director position in the church. She will graduate in February 2012 with a Bachelor's degree in sociology and hopes to go on to earn her Master's. She currently has a 3.6 GPA.

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>.