



Media Release

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Bentonville Walmart greeter who's blind wins award

Although it's been difficult, Beverly Osborne of Bentonville has not let being blind since birth prevent her from achieving her goals. She now has her own apartment and a job she enjoys at the Walmart Supercenter.

She was over age three when she was diagnosed with congenital cataracts. In addition to being diagnosed late, she said the techniques to remove cataracts were not as advanced as they are today and created a lot of scar tissue. Her lenses were removed, and her retina development was affected. These earlier treatments prevented the possibility of having retinal implants. Since that time she has had additional surgeries and can see hand motion at three feet in her left eye and at 20 feet in her right eye.

"I'm considerably fortunate in that it's something I've had from birth. I've never known anything else. Between me and God, we've developed some awesome coping mechanisms," Osborne said. "Life doesn't all hinge on sight. It's just learning different ways to do something. Like my 'owl impression', I turn my head in the direction I want to look since I don't have peripheral vision. You learn to compensate."

As a result of her determination and success, Osborne 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. She was chosen from an area that includes Washington and Benton counties. The award presentation will be made at the noon meeting of the Bentonville Lions Club at Zary's Acropolis restaurant on Nov. 3. A luncheon will precede the meeting.

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Her employer, the Walmart Supercenter in Bentonville, has been named as the area DSB Employer of the Year and will be recognized as a business partner that hires people with disabilities.

“I feel considerably surprised. It’s confirmation of what I’ve accomplished,” said Osborne, about being chosen for the award and comparing her circumstances before finding a job to her situation now.

“Ms. Osborne has come so far in the last year, I felt it crucial to give her the kind of recognition she deserves by awarding her with this nomination. She has worked hard to push through adversity and really jump on the path towards complete independence,” said Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Patrick Callaway, who made the nomination. “It is a long road towards employment in these hard economic times.”

“Ms. Osborne proves that if you blow off the rejections no matter how consistent and all encompassing they may feel, you will land the job you may have never thought you would obtain.” He said Osborne was determined to persevere through the frustration of searching for a job and is a role model for others with visual impairments who may be facing similar obstacles.

In addition to being a door greeter at the Walmart Supercenter in Bentonville, she also relieves other employees at the customer service desk and does returns. Osborne said DSB purchased a hand-held CCTV for her, which reads bar codes and enables her to return stock to shelves at work. She can also use it at home to identify canned food and other items.

Osborne expressed her gratitude for the support she received from the staff in the DSB Fayetteville office. “I could call them at difficult times. They’re all awesome.” Rehabilitation Assistant Tonya Zarlingo said she “just tried to give Ms. Osborne confidence and encourage her to keep going.” Osborne said Callaway found the job opportunity for her, and Rehabilitation Teacher Omagene Farley found her an affordable apartment that would allow her to keep the two small dogs she calls “her boys”. Farley also marked Osborne’s kitchen appliances with raised dots, so she could feel the settings and prepare her own meals.

Transportation was a “big challenge” for Osborne, who initially lived in rural areas prior to moving to Bentonville. Public transportation didn’t exist, and the cost of taxi cabs was too high. Her DSB vocational rehabilitation counselor paid for a driver to take her to look for employment and to other services until Osborne decided to move into town where she could access city bus service.

At times when her work schedule at the Walmart Supercenter does not match the times the bus runs, her DSB counselor pays for taxi service. She said she “was grateful” that DSB paid the first two months rent to get her established in an apartment near her job. DSB also purchased a long white cane to help Osborne get around in her home and surrounding area. She now has more independence.

In her leisure time, Osborne enjoys her pets and house plants. She has a “green thumb.” She also has a grown daughter.

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>.