

Media Release

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For Immediate Release

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Forrest City man celebrates 45th year in vending career

Harold Brewer has seen many food trends come and go in the 45 years he has been the vending facility manager on the campus of Crowley's Ridge Technical Institute (CRTI) in Forrest City.

He remembers when pickled pigs feet were once popular chow between classes and how a decade later he couldn't keep enough Moon Pies on hand for students.

"When I started, candy was a nickel, drinks were 10 cents, and a pack of cigarettes was 35 cents. Hamburgers were 45 cents, and now are \$2.50, which is still cheap compared to other places," Brewer recalled. "People aren't drinking as much coffee. I used to make 20 pots before 8 a.m. Now I make five to six pots in a whole day."

He is licensed under the Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) Vending Facility Program (VFP). He became interested in managing a vending stand as a student at Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Little Rock when his classmates voted him as the main manager of the campus vending stand his senior year. Upon graduation, he trained at the same location where he is now.



Vending Site Supervisor Stacye Nichols, of the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind, presents Harold Brewer, center, with a certificate of appreciation recognizing his 45 years of service as a licensed blind vendor. Seated with Brewer are other members of the Arkansas Association of Blind Vending Facility Managers Board. The award was given at the Division's 2015 Sales Seminar in North Little Rock.

Blind Services operates the Vending Facility Program in accordance with the federal Randolph-Sheppard Act. Originally passed in 1936, the act created entrepreneurial opportunities for people who are blind, through the operation of food and vending service businesses located on federal property. The Arkansas General Assembly expanded the reach of the Program in 1969 by passing legislation that assigned the right to operate food and vending businesses on property owned, leased or rented by state agencies to Licensed Blind Vendors under the Program. There are currently 18 vending stands manned by vendors and an additional 16 highway vending machine sites across Arkansas.

As part of its “management services” under the federal law, Blind Services locates the sales sites; initially equips and stocks the facilities; maintains the equipment; trains the vendors; and provides oversight and record keeping. “The vending locations operate somewhat like a franchise with the manager drawing his or her earnings from the profits of the location. Like any other food business, profits in vending locations are dependent upon competition, quality products and services and the personality and business acumen of the manager,” said Blind Services Director Katy Morris.

In addition to his vending management career, Brewer is very community-minded. He has a full white beard and hair and for 29 years has played Santa Claus in Christmas parades in Forrest City and surrounding towns. He also has filled this role for schools, police departments, Woodruff Electric Cooperative, and the Stone House Museum in Colt. His wife Jane dresses as Mrs. Claus. He and Jane have a blended family, totaling six grown children and 11 grandchildren.

Brewer also has participated in numerous campus fundraisers, including a beauty pageant, a beautiful legs contest and a dunking booth. “Everybody knew me, so they all wanted to dunk me,” he said. “I got dunked 52 times. I thought I’d drown before the day was over.”

He also assisted with the annual barbecue for 28 years to raise money for students’ school books.

Vending hasn’t been Brewer’s only career. He has worked as the maintenance man at a mobile home park where his wife was the manager and done chair caning, which he learned at the Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. He also is a member of the American Council of the Blind.

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.