



Media Release

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Small business owner who's visually impaired gains hope, wins award

Willie Battle of Stamps who owns a small business in Magnolia, was like “most people, they take their health for granted”, but he has turned his life around with the support of others and a new found “hope”.

Because of his determination to overcome adversity and succeed at work, Battle has been named as the area's Consumer of the Year (COY) by the Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB). The award presentation will be made at the noon meeting of the Magnolia Lions Club on November 27, at Miller's Cafeteria.

He is one of only 13 people in Arkansas who will receive an area award. DSB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Tarrie Barnes nominated him from an area that includes Ouachita, Union, Columbia, Ashley, Calhoun, and Bradley counties.

“I had diabetes for a long time. I was unaware of how diabetes affected the eyes and other parts of the body. I didn't take care of myself, and eventually it caught up with me. I started losing my sight. I couldn't tell colors like I used to,” Battle said. “I was like a lot of people who take their health for granted. I lost my kidneys in 2010. I had total kidney failure, but now have gotten that under control with dialysis at home. I take care of myself now.”

“I'd been self-employed all of my life, so I didn't have good insurance. I was in bad shape and didn't know where to turn. I was unable to afford the surgery I needed,” Battles said. He had detached retinas and other eye problems. A doctor referred him to DSB.

“I was unaware of DSB and its services,” Battle said. He was struck by the kindness of DSB staff, especially his counselor. “He was so genuine in his concern about me. He made me want to be kinder

too, even more than I was before. He gave me strength to go on. He treated me like I was a person, not just a case, like another human being. I felt like I wanted to live again. I had put my business up for sale. Through him (Barnes), God just gave me hope and I changed my mind.”

Battle had earned a certificate in electrical technology from Caddo Parrish Career Center in Shreveport, Louisiana, and owns his own business, Electro Mart in Magnolia. As an electrical technician, he sells and installs electrical items in homes and cars. As a music lover, he also sells keyboards, guitars, and amplifiers. He told his DSB counselor that he’s willing to be a role model for others who want to learn how to operate own their own businesses.

Battle and his wife Anna have been married since 2006. He is the minister of music at Ebenezer Baptist Church and plays the organ and directs the choir.

This is the fifth year that DSB has given Consumer of the Year achievement awards. At the end of the year, the DSB Board will select an overall state winner from the area winners who were nominated.

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>.