



Media Release

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Band teacher who's blind wins achievement award

Band teacher Jessica Burmingham of Osceola, who's legally blind, has a list of accomplishments that would make anyone tired just thinking about them. Now adding to that list is her being named as the area's Consumer of the Year (COY) by the Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB).

Because of her determination to overcome adversity, succeed at work and become a role model for others, she has been chosen as one of only 13 people in Arkansas who will receive an area award. DSB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Darline Tucker nominated her for the award, which will be presented at the noon meeting of the Osceola Kiwanis Club on December 13, at the Harold Ohlendorf Civic Center.

Her employer, Rivercrest High School of Wilson, will be recognized as the area Employer of the Year as an outstanding business partner for its commitment to promoting the employment of persons with vision impairment.

Burmingham is in her second year of teaching band at Rivercrest High School and led her students to win the Class A band championship at the Arkansas Open in Jonesboro this year.

When she is not advancing her own students, she assists with band camps and competitions around the United States, most recently the Bands of America and the Marching Grand Nationals, both held in Indianapolis. Locally, she assists with the University of Central Arkansas' Dixie Band Camp.

She has run in three marathons, including the Little Rock marathon twice and a marathon in Minneapolis this summer.

Burmingham plays trumpet in the Crittenden County Community Band, which gives concerts periodically throughout the year. She has an active schedule of personal practice, rehearsals, and performances.

Although she has played trumpet for 15 years, her college music degree required her to learn all of the instruments needed to teach band. She still keeps up this diverse knowledge to better serve her students.

Burmingham was born with oculocutaneous albinism, which affects the pigmentation of the skin, hair, and eyes. It causes reduced sharpness in eyesight; rapid, involuntary eye movements (nystagmus); and increased sensitivity to light.

When she was in high school, she was referred to DSB. She said she's "very thankful" for the services she received from DSB, especially her counselor. Burmingham has always had a passion for music and a desire to teach it. DSB helped her reach this goal by "paying most of (her) tuition" and "helping get whatever I needed." She graduated from UCA with a Bachelor's degree in Music Education with a cumulative GPA of 3.094, an admirable feat, Tucker said.

"This was a result of her dedication, diligence, and hard work towards completing this accomplishment," said Tucker. "It was not an easy task. Jessica has overcome multiple barriers."

This is the fifth year that DSB has given Consumer of the Year 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>.