



Media Release

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Pea Ridge man regains sight, starts over, earns achievement award

The three sons of Lawrence “Larry” Hartman of Pea Ridge turned the tables on him when he lost his vision and his business. Hartman had raised the boys by himself. Now they have stepped up to help him rebuild his life.

Hartman said he was diagnosed with bilateral retinal detachments. Since the retinal detachments were progressive, he was in imminent danger of becoming legally or totally blind.

“I lost my business in all this,” said Hartman. At the time he was self-employed as an independent operator for Bimbo Bakeries. He owned his own bread truck and his own route. “It’s up to you to make customer contacts, order the bread, etc. I used to get up at 1:30 in the morning and work 12-hour days.” After being diagnosed, he spent four months recovering from surgeries. “I couldn’t leave home alone. I couldn’t drive, so my business went downhill fast.” He moved in with his oldest son.

“My sons turned the tables on me and took care of me. When going out in public, I always felt like I was in the way. At Wal-Mart I’d freeze up. My hearing was amplified.” To get him used to sounds and crowds his sons would take him shopping and to large music performances. “We were big music fans and my sons took me to concerts.” He always enjoyed playing tennis and during his recovery they’d play tennis with him. It helped him get his depth perception skills back.

His eye doctor had referred him to the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind to help pay for his surgeries and medical care. “I can’t say enough about DSB. DSB’s stance is we’re not here to get you through surgery. We’re here to see you through surgery and get you back on your feet,” Hartman said. “I didn’t want to sit home. I wanted to be a person with a job.”

With perseverance, his family's encouragement, and DSB services, he regained his eyesight and in October 2012, found employment as the Merchandising Manager with Barnes and Noble in Rogers.

Because of his determination to overcome adversity and succeed at work, Hartman has been named as the area's Consumer of the Year by DSB.

Hartman is one of only 13 people in Arkansas who will receive an area award and was chosen from an area that includes Carroll, Madison, Boone, Newton, Marion, Searcy, Baxter, and Fulton counties. An overall state winner will be named at the end of the year.

Hartman's employer, Barnes and Noble in Rogers, has been named as an area Employer of the Year as an outstanding business partner for its commitment to promoting the employment of persons with vision impairment.

The award presentation was made November 6, at the noon meeting of the Rogers Lions Club at the Golden Coral restaurant.

"In the beginning I was looking at the possibility of never being able to drive, not being able to read. The eye surgeon was pleased at my progress each time I saw him. We didn't think I'd recover this far," said Hartman. "Now I can drive and can function as I did before."

His DSB Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher Jacob Grace said Hartman "was very self-motivated." His Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Carla Hiebsch, who nominated him for the award, agreed and said, "He was very involved with his case regarding his sight restoration needs and job placement services." He attended and passed the four-day DSB Operation Jumpstart entrepreneur training for small business owners held in Harrison. DSB referred Hartman to area Workforce Centers and job fairs. "He was very active in the job seeking process, including working on his resume and completing job applications," Hiebsch said.

In his current job, Hartman supervises other employees, handles customer service, and is in charge of advertising, displays, product placement, and determining marketing strategies. He is busy now designing the store layout for the holidays. Hartman said he finds his new job "very satisfying."

This is the sixth 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.

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.