

## Media Release

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**For Immediate Release**

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### **Paragould man who's legally blind earns achievement award**

Keith Clark of Paragould has been named as an area Consumer of the Year by the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB). He is the manager of Hibbett Sports in Paragould.

Because of his determination to overcome adversity, serve others, and succeed at work, DSB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Charlotte Evans, nominated him for the achievement award.



Clark said he was born legally blind from Degenerative Myopia, a severe, progressive type of nearsightedness that elongates the shape of the eye and can cause blindness. In fact, Degenerative Myopia is the seventh leading cause of blindness, according to Prevent Blindness America.

“Sometimes being blind is the hardest thing you can do and a lot of people don’t understand that. You just have to go with the flow and do what you can,” Clark said. He wants other individuals who are blind or visually impaired to know they can still work and do what they want to do. “Just take it one step at a time.”

“Mr. Clark moved his way up from hourly worker to manager,” said Evans. “He is a good role model and works hard to be a successful employer and employee (store manager and Hibbett Sports employee).”

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Clark is one of only 13 people in Arkansas to receive an area award and was chosen from the area including are Clay, Craighead, Greene, Jackson, Lawrence, Poinsett, Randolph and Woodruff Counties.

Clark's employer, Hibbett Sports, received an award as an outstanding business partner for its commitment to promoting the employment of persons with vision impairment.

The award presentation was made at the noon meeting of the Paragould Lions Club, held at the Grecian Steak House on October 6.

"I'm a person who tries to work hard and get ahead. I like talking to people. I don't meet a stranger," Clark said. He worked in manufacturing for 10 years until the company closed. Then he became a successful realtor for four years until the economy slipped into a recession and demand in the housing market dropped dramatically. Clark has been the manager at Hibbett Sports for almost 8 years.

Retail work involves a lot of hours, so it limits his community involvement and volunteer work, but he tries to incorporate helping others into his daily life. "I go the extra mile to help someone. When God gives me the opportunity, then I'm there." For example, there was a woman in the check-out line with her children and she couldn't pay the bill, so he paid the tab plus gave her a \$50 gift card. "It's not just me. It's God using me. I enjoy helping people. Even if a person isn't (wealthy), he can always help someone else in some way."

Clark is originally from Jonesboro, but has lived in Paragould for most of his adult life. He said DSB has provided services for him since he was 14-years-old. Clark enjoys designing things on his computer, and he goes to church online.

This is the seventh 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. An overall state winner will be selected at the end of the year.

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.

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Photo cutline: From the left are George "Ed" Morten, president of the Paragould Lions Club; Charlotte Evans, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor; Keith Clark, manager of the Hibbett Sports store in Paragould; and B. J. Miller, Arkansas District Team Leader of Hibbett Sports. Clark has been named as an area Consumer of the Year by the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind and was presented an award at the October 6 meeting of the Paragould Lions Club. His employer Hibbett Sports also received an award.