Little Rock man regains his vision, earns achievement award

Thomas Tatum of Little Rock almost lost his career due to vision problems, but now he has been named the area’s outstanding Consumer of the Year by the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB).

DSB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Debora Coleman nominated him for the achievement award because of his determination to overcome adversity and succeed at work. Tatum had been a successful professional painter when he began having vision problems.

“Mr. Tatum was a joy to work with,” said Coleman. “He was definitely focused on reaching his vocational goals. His success was mainly due to his commitment and his eagerness to maintain his employment.”

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From the left are DSB Field Administrator Christy Lamas, SIDECO Project Manager Anthony Tippet, incoming Little Rock Founders Lions Club President Tammy Pinney, and Thomas Tatum of Little Rock. Tatum was named the area’s outstanding Consumer of the Year by the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind and his employer, SIDECO Inc., was recognized by DSB as an outstanding business partner for its commitment to promoting the employment of persons with vision impairment.
The award presentation was made May 11, at the noon meeting of the Little Rock Founders Lions Club, held at World Services for the Blind (WSB). Tatum was selected from a populous area comprised of south Pulaski County.

His employer, SIDECO Inc., of North Little Rock, was recognized by DSB as an outstanding business partner for its commitment to promoting the employment of persons with vision impairment.

Tatum had been a painter for 11 years with SIDECO Inc. when his vision became blurry and distorted. He said his retina specialist told him that the type of cataracts he had was progressing rapidly and dangerously affecting his depth perception, which might cause him to have an accident or not be able to paint accurately. The specialist referred him to DSB and Tatum said his DSB counselor worked with the doctor to “expedite things when she saw how fast my eyesight was going down.”

Tatum expressed his appreciation for the services he received from DSB. The agency paid for his eye surgeries and related medical treatment. “I was preparing for the worst. DSB saved me. I thought my career was over. I’m back to 20/20 vision now.”

“I can’t say enough about the SIDECO owners Jimmy Russell and his wife Mary. They were really good to me. The company let me do warehouse work when I began having vision problems. They all stuck with me. Now I’m back where I was (as a painter),” Tatum said.

Tatum has spent his life working jobs as a painter, a construction worker, and a maintenance man. Now he’s putting these skills together and remodeling a home of his own.

This is the ninth 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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