

Media Release

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Royal man who's blind earns achievement award



Joe Sexson of Royal speaks to the Hot Springs Lions Club at the Arlington Resort Hotel and Spa after receiving an achievement award from the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind. To the left are Lion President Morris Cash and Secretary-Treasurer William Grim. The award presentation fell during October's Blindness Awareness Month.

Joe Sexson of Royal, near Hot Springs, has been named the area's outstanding Consumer of the Year by the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB), because of his determination to overcome adversity, serve others, and succeed at work.

After 40 years as a police paramedic, Sexson started losing his vision and had to change careers. He now owns Dream Mtn. Kennel in Royal.

"I am so proud that DSB considered me deserving of this nomination," said Sexson. He is one of only 13 people in Arkansas to receive an area award and was chosen from the area that includes Saline, Garland, Hot Spring, and Clark Counties.

The achievement award was presented at the evening meeting of the Hot Springs Lions Club held

at the Arlington Resort Hotel and Spa on October 1. The award presentation fell during October's Blindness Awareness Month, as well as National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

Sexson led a remarkable career before his vision started its decline. He was one of only a few people with dual certification in police work and emergency medical services (EMS). He served in the

Pulaski County Sheriff's office for 20 years. He received the National Medal of Valor and was co-winner of the National Deputy Sheriff of the Year award. He was instrumental in starting the Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) and EMS programs in Arkansas. EMS training is more advanced and requires 2,000 hours of training.

After speaking at a conference in Baltimore, he was recruited to be the personal paramedic to the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia and the royal family. "I traveled the world and lived in the palace. It was a fairytale job."

However, a year later an opportunity he'd wanted for a long time came up and he went to Alaska to fly helicopter rescue. He contracted a serious viral infection from a patient in the Arctic Circle and almost died. He spent weeks in the hospital and the infection went into his eyes. He healed, but he and his wife Susie decided to return to Arkansas to care for her parents.

He became the Director of Emergency Services for the city of Hot Springs and was in charge of the ambulance service. He then held similar posts in Fort Smith and Little Rock. Sexson became part of the national Disaster Medical Assistance Team (D-Mat) and was called into service for federally declared emergencies, including the World Trade Center bombing and Hurricane Katrina. In August 2014, Sexson was inducted into the Arkansas EMS Hall of Fame.

Sexson said his vision had declined over the past four and a half years. His eyes had scarring from the earlier viral infection. He had a cornea replacement that failed, but his second transplant was successful. He had other surgeries, including removal of cataracts in one eye and a lens implant in the other eye. He expressed his appreciation that DSB paid for surgeries and medical treatments that his limited insurance did not cover.

In 2014, Sexson partnered with DSB's small business program, which helped him develop a realistic business plan for Dream Mtn. Kennel and provided start-up funding. He explained his vision was for "an all-inclusive kennel that does not charge ala carte for necessary services like daily exercise, people time, and special diets." His dream became reality with the kennel's opening on October 28, 2014. Sexson said business in the first year has exceeded expectations.

Sexson and his wife have two sons and four grandchildren. Their son Kevin is a Little Rock policeman, and their son Joseph is a senior systems analyst for Axiom and a major in the Arkansas National Guard.

This is the eighth year that DSB has given Consumer of the Year awards. An overall state winner will be selected at the end of the year.

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.