



# Media Release

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**For Immediate Release**

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## **Grady man gains access to career, wins service award**

Restored vision has given Jermaine Williams of Grady, near Stuttgart, access to a truck driving career he enjoys.

Because of his determination to overcome adversity and succeed at work, Williams has been named as the area's Consumer of the Year (COY) by the Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB).

He is one of only 13 people in Arkansas who will receive an area award. DSB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Audrey Veasey nominated him from an area that includes Arkansas, Chicot, Cleveland, Dallas, Desha, Drew, Jefferson, and Lincoln counties.

The award presentation will be made at a meeting of the Grady Lions Club at Hardin's Restaurant on Highway 65 South on December 10, at 7 p.m. His employer, St. Michael's Farm, will be recognized as the area Employer of the Year by DSB.

Williams began losing his vision at age 20 and was referred to DSB. He was diagnosed with keratoconus, a degenerative eye condition which causes the cornea to thin and become cone-shaped. At the time, he was working at a combination convenience store and tire shop with no insurance. He was "happy" that DSB could help pay for his vision care and possibly help him retain employment. "It has helped me keep my vision longer. I'll be able to enjoy things and do more," Williams said. He's 22 years old now and uses bioptic lens for driving and contacts for other tasks.

After getting special contact lens for keratoconus, Jermaine decided he wanted to work somewhere other than a convenience store. He and Veasey discussed other career options. To research jobs, Williams was referred to the accessible kiosk DSB installed at the Department of Workforce Services in Pine Bluff. Similar kiosks are placed in 17 DWS locations around the state, enabling people who are

blind or visually impaired to independently search for jobs. During this process, Williams decided he would like to be a truck driver.

DSB paid his way through Pine Bluff Truck Driving School. “The trucking school was really cool about (his bioptic lens). They taught me everything I needed to know. It was very fun.”

When he graduated from trucking school in July, 2011, the school told him that the best paying jobs were traveling cross country. “I tried overnight driving, but I didn’t like it.” Williams said he likes being at home. He works in Stuttgart and the surrounding counties.

He enjoys farm work and likes his supervisor Paul Johnson. “It’s seven days a week, long days from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. I enjoy it when I’m driving a lot during harvest season. I’m fully energized.” He said it goes slow when the grain trucks are backed up in long lines waiting for processing or storage.

This is the fifth 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. At the end of the year, the DSB Board will select an overall state winner from the area winners who were nominated. The announcement will be made at the board meeting Dec. 14, and will be followed by a reception.

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>.