

Media Release

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Pine Bluff man overcomes misfortune, earns achievement award



From the left are Tamara Hill, the consumer's wife; Wal-Mart Co-Manager Michael Lofton; area Consumer of the Year Thomas Hill Jr.; and Tonya Farris, also of Wal-Mart. Mr. Hill and his employer received awards from the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind at a meeting of the Pine Bluff Downtown Lions Club held at the Pine Bluff Country Club.

Thomas Hill Jr. of Pine Bluff has been named the area's Department of Human Service Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) Consumer of the Year.

Because of his determination to overcome adversity and succeed at work, DSB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Audrey Veasey nominated him for the award. "Mr. Hill has had misfortune after misfortune, but he keeps on." He has persevered to become vocationally rehabilitated and employed again.

Hill almost lost his life when he was a passenger in a car accident. "It was July 5, 2001, and the doctor told my family I wouldn't live to see July 6. They flew me by helicopter from Pine Bluff to Memphis."

"I feel like I have a second chance," Hill said. The car wreck caused him to have a traumatic brain injury that causes seizures. "The frontal lobe has a lot to do with your vision. I'm completely blind in my right eye and partially blind in my left eye."

When he started looking for work, he had no luck for almost a year, so he and his counselor decided that more education might make him more employable. He enrolled at Renaissance Healthcare in Pine Bluff to become a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA).

Becoming a CNA appealed to Hill because he became "very interested in the workings of the human body" after his accident, and he said, "I really do love helping people."

"He completed the classes and did a great job," said Veasey. While searching for a CNA position, he decided to apply for a position at Wal-Mart in Pine Bluff. He started as a night stocker in June 2013 and has since moved up to the maintenance crew. Hill said he enjoys the work and the people.

Hill's employer, Wal-Mart, will receive an award as an outstanding business partner for its commitment to promoting the employment of persons with vision impairment.

Hill is one of only 13 people in Arkansas who will receive an area award and was chosen from an area that includes Arkansas, Chicot, Cleveland, Dallas, Desha, Drew, Jefferson, and Lincoln counties. An overall state winner will be selected at the end of the year.

The award presentation was made at the noon meeting of the Pine Bluff Downtown Lions Club on May 2, at the Pine Bluff Country Club.

Hill had completed the 12th grade and just received his barber license before the accident. Although he can no longer work as a barber and cut hair, he maintains his barber license. "You never know about the future" with advances in medical science.

He and his wife Tamara are active in the community and are members of True Light Church of God in Christ. "I'm a Christian and church is an important part of my life."

Hill said he appreciates the services provided by DSB. The agency helped him while he was in the hospital and later with eye doctor visits. A DSB Rehabilitation Teacher taught him independent living skills; provided him with magnifiers and other assistive technology; gave him white canes for mobility travel; and placed soft plastic, self-adhesive, raised dots on everyday items in his home for tactual identification, including the dials on his stove so he could cook. He said DSB also paid for his tuition and books to CNA school; connected him with resources, such as books on tape from the Library for the Blind; and paid for additional independent living training from World Services for the Blind.

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.

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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