

Media Release

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Fort Smith woman who's blind earns achievement award



From the left, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Tina Shores presents Vending Facility Manager Pamela Armstrong with an area Consumer of the Year award from the Department of Human Service Division of Services for the Blind, while DHS Sebastian County Administrator Gwen Lovelace shows her support.

Pamela Rae Armstrong of Fort Smith has been named the area's outstanding Consumer of the Year by the Department of Human Service Division of Services for the Blind (DSB).

Armstrong is one of only 13 people in Arkansas who will receive an area award and was chosen from an area that includes Sebastian, Montgomery, Scott, Logan, Johnson, Yell, Crawford, and Franklin counties. DSB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Tina Shores nominated her for the award because of her determination to overcome adversity and succeed at work.

"I was in my late 30's when I lost my sight, so it was a big impact. I lost my job and my house and was divorced after 17 years of marriage – all in one year," Armstrong said. Histoplasmosis affected both of her eyes, she said. Histoplasmosis scars the lungs and in later years as the scars thin, the tissues leak fluid and cause blindness.

When Shores told Armstrong about a vending stand manager position opening in the State Office Building in Fort Smith, Armstrong said she "struggled with the decision to move back after being away for six years," explaining as a person who's blind she "would have to readjust and learn where everything is again." She worked at Whirlpool Corporation in Fort Smith when she lost her sight. Then she decided the new opportunity had come at the right time.

“Pamela chose to move to Fort Smith and start a new life, which also allowed her to be closer to her family,” said Shores. Armstrong has three grown children and three granddaughters there.

“I wanted to work,” said Armstrong. “I feel alive again. I feel like I’m doing something. You just can’t give up. You make choices, whether you want to sit around and be sad or do something with your life.”

“Life is good now. I love what I do. If you get up every morning and enjoy what you do, that’s huge. I remarried and have a great husband, Willie Ray Armstrong. It’s unbelievable how good things are now. I appreciate God. He’s brought me through a lot. I’m happier now than I was before my vision problems. That’s crazy, isn’t it? It’s being humble and appreciating what you have,” Armstrong said.

The award presentation was made May 7, at the vending stand on the second floor of the State Office Building at 616 Garrison in Fort Smith.

“Pamela has been successful in her employment. She provides a good service to the employees of the State Office Building,” said Shores. “She’s friendly, puts an extra effort in providing good customer service, and goes above and beyond to look for new products to help with repeat business.”

During this past year Armstrong received the "Friendliest Vendor" award in the DSB Vending Facility Program. Other vending stand managers elected Armstrong as an area representative to the DSB Vendor Board, which sets policy for the program. Armstrong represents all vendors outside of the Little Rock area.

Armstrong went through extensive training to become a vendor. In addition to training in Little Rock, she also completed up to six weeks of on-the-job training at the vending stand with a former vendor in Fort Smith. “She worked hard during the day when she was on-site, as well reading and studying her training and vending procedure manuals in the evenings when she was off work,” said Shores.

Armstrong completed online training from the Department of Health (ADH) on food safety and related topics. Afterward she successfully passed tests by DSB and ADH. “She was a delight to work with. She was very self-motivated,” said Scott Murphy, DSB Administrative Analyst, who trained Armstrong.

Armstrong said she appreciated the services provided by DSB. The agency paid her relocation expenses and her deposit and first month’s rent; bought her magnifiers and a talking weight scale; and provided her with the vending stand opportunity.

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.