

Media Release

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For Immediate Release

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Fayetteville woman who's visually impaired earns achievement award



Emily Buckingham, of Fayetteville, who is visually impaired, has been named the area's outstanding Consumer of the Year by the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB).

"Mrs. Buckingham is employed as a Telecommunications Attendant with JB Hunt Transportation," said DSB Vocational

Rehabilitation Counselor Carolyn Jackson, who nominated her for the award because of her determination to overcome adversity and succeed at work. "She has worked for the company since September 2013. Her job duties include answering the phone (about 300 calls a day), sorting mail, doing data input, invoicing, and updating personnel records."

Buckingham is one of only 13 people in Arkansas who will receive the achievement award and was selected from an area that includes Washington, Madison, Newton and Searcy Counties.

The award presentation was made at the noon meeting of the Fayetteville Lions Club on June 3, at the Apple Blossom Brewing Company restaurant. Her employer, JB Hunt Transportation, was recognized as an outstanding business partner for its commitment to promoting the employment of persons with vision impairment.

Buckingham, 27, said she developed eye problems in March 2011, during a road trip with her grandmother, mother, and sister in Florida. "I spent a lot of time lying on the beach. I felt irritation in my eye. That night I woke up in pain and my eye was red and light sensitive. The second day it was

worse.” Doctors in Florida and back home diagnosed with her with Uveitis, an inflammatory eye condition that clouds vision, and prescribed steroid eye drops.

One Sunday when she rubbed her eye “something popped”. Her doctor met her that day in his office and said her pupil and iris were fusing together because of inflammation. He referred her to a Uveitis specialist. In addition to eye drops, she received steroid injections. She would go into remission, but then the condition would flare up again.

In November 2012, after her father’s funeral, she said she developed steroid-induced glaucoma. Buckingham was using drops several times a day, but the pressure was not coming down. One day it was 50 (more than twice what it should be). She had emergency surgery in her left eye, but instead of saving it, the surgery made her vision worse. It created a wrinkle in the eye, which was permanent and not correctable.

In June near her first Father’s Day without her Dad, she experienced the first Uveitis flare in her right eye, which had been her good eye. At the time she was working at a small, family-owned bakery and making “decent wages”, but didn’t have health insurance. The doctor referred her to DSB.

“DSB was really a savior at that time. They paid for surgeries, other medical treatment, and provided counseling. In a lot of different ways they supported me and got me to where I could support myself.”

“Now I celebrate my anniversary of my last Uveitis flare each year on June 16th. It will be two years this June. I’m amazed at how far I’ve come. Before all I could do was sit in a dark room. I wasn’t working. I couldn’t read. I couldn’t drive,” Buckingham said. Her vision is now stable.

Her counselor said, “Emily is now able to drive and work. She has insurance through her employer. She also was married on March 26, 2015!”

“Emily recently received a performance-based raise which was based on an excellent review and is looking forward to growing within the company,” said Jackson. “JB Hunt offers training incentives and opportunities to advance and promotes from within.”

Buckingham said it is her long-term goal to complete a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration at the University of Arkansas Sam M. Walton College of Business. She said JB Hunt Transportation offers tuition reimbursement and she appreciates this opportunity.

This is the eighth year that DSB has given Consumer of the Year awards to recognize individuals who have managed their vocational 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.

Photo caption:

Emily Buckingham was named an area Consumer of the Year by the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) at the noon meeting of the Fayetteville Lions Club June 3, at the Apple Blossom Brewing Company restaurant. Her employer, JB Hunt Transportation, was recognized as an outstanding business partner for its commitment to promoting the employment of persons with vision impairment. On the back row from the left are Eric Airola, Senior Director of Human Resources at JB Hunt Transportation, and Brad McBride, her co-worker. On the front row from the left are Carolyn Jackson, DSB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor; Buckingham; Crystal Landaverde, her supervisor, and Michael Scribner, president of the Fayetteville Lions Club.