



Media Release

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Local doctor who's blind to receive achievement award

Your whole life can change in a split second. Just ask Dr. Jaafar Al-Azzawi.

He was an orthopedic surgeon and very active in sports – until he was injured in a roadside blast in Iraq and was immediately blinded.

Dr. Al-Azzawi had to re-build his life. He emigrated from Bagdad, Iraq to the United States in 2007, learned skills to cope with his blindness, and is now employed as an Anatomy and Physiology Instructor at Pulaski Technical College, where he teaches students in nursing, physical therapy and other medical fields.

Because of his determination to overcome adversity, succeed at work, and serve others, Dr. Al-Azzawi has been named as the area's Consumer of the Year 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 and was chosen from an area comprised of south Pulaski County. An overall state winner will be named at the end of the year.

His employer, Pulaski Technical College, has been named as an area Employer of the Year as an outstanding business partner for its commitment to promoting the employment of persons with vision impairment.

Dr. Al-Azzawi and his employer will be recognized at a meeting of the Little Rock Founders Lions Club on October 16. The award presentation falls during October's Blindness Awareness Month, as well as National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

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“He has always demonstrated a determined and confident spirit,” said his Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher Debera Coleman, who nominated him for the award. “I was elated when he was able to find a job that would afford him the opportunity to use his knowledge to teach in a field that is related to his qualifications as a doctor.”

Dr. Al-Azzawi graduated from Basrah Medical School in 1986, and he became board certified in fracture and orthopedic surgery in 1994. He worked as a Consultant Orthopedic Surgeon for ten years and served as a Vice Dean for a medical school in Iraq, where he also taught classes in orthopedics and anatomy.

“His employer has gained a determined, polite, sincere and dedicated employee who will immensely enhance the goals and high standards set out by his employer,” Coleman said.

Dr. Al-Azzawi said he learned independent living skills, assistive technology, and computer skills at DSB and World Services for the Blind and then moved to Los Angeles, where he had a sister, to take sensory awareness training at the Braille Institute of America. A year later he returned to Little Rock.

“I love being in the United States, but I especially love it in Little Rock,” Dr. Al-Azzawi said. “I am more comfortable here.” He said he enjoys the small town atmosphere, the weather, the change of seasons, and the large number of friends he has made.

Dr. Al-Azzawi and his wife, Dr. Zeinab Hasan, have two children, ages 10 and 12. She is a physician at UAMS.

This is the sixth 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.