



# Media Release

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**For Immediate Release**

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## **Shannon Hills man overcomes adversity, wins award**

In today's economic times people sometimes have to make sacrifices, travel far from home to find work, and live apart from their families when they do land a job. Marvin Howden of Shannon Hills in Saline County knows that dilemma firsthand, but he had more of an uphill battle than most job seekers.

Howden, a skilled house painter for 30 years, had bilateral cataracts which had progressed to the point that he could no longer distinguish colors reliably. For any painter this would be a serious problem. For Howden, this cost him his job.

His eyesight was restored through surgery, and once his physical restoration was complete, he immediately sought work. He took out-of-state contract jobs that took him away from home for weeks at a time. He missed his family, but at least he was able to provide for them. His situation has improved and now he is employed locally.

Because of his determination to overcome adversity and succeed at work, Howden 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 was chosen from an area including Saline, Garland, Grant, Hot Spring, and Clark counties. He is one of only 13 people in Arkansas who will receive an area award.

Howden said he was "real excited" and felt honored that his DSB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Matt Lyles had nominated him for the award. "Matt has worked with me so much. He's just an excellent man." The award presentation will be made at a meeting of the Benton Lions Club on November 8, at 6:30 p.m., at the Western Sizzlin restaurant.

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His employer, Controlled Automations of Bauxite, will be recognized as the area Employer of the Year by DSB. Controlled Automations designs and manufactures large machinery and software, which is shipped all over the world. The company also does retrofitting of control systems and remanufacturing of structural steel fabricating machinery.

Howden had been relieved when he found out about DSB and its services and was able to have his cataracts removed. “When someone loses his eyesight, it’s scary. I couldn’t find help. I didn’t have insurance and couldn’t afford surgery.”

“I just wanted to be able to see my grandchildren,” he said, but the results of the surgery exceeded his expectations. “I saw colors I hadn’t seen in years. It was a new world. I was like a little kid. Everything was so bright.”

After his vision was restored, DSB paid for him to take a professional course in faux finishes, and Lyles found him a job opportunity at Controlled Automations. Howden said he is now a skilled painter in industrial applications and has “benefits, a 401k retirement plan, vacation time, and health insurance. “I don’t feel I deserve all this. I’m appreciative of everything that’s happened to me in my life.” Howden is “very satisfied” with his job and said, “People are real good around here (at work). Everybody helps each other.”

Family comes first with Howden. He has a grown stepson that he raised alone since the child was age two, and for the last six months, Howden has been raising his grandchildren. The first person he told about being chosen for the area COY award was his mother; then he shared the news with other relatives. “Mom was excited and proud of me for me accomplishing everything I’ve done. I’ve always been a hard worker and tried to do my best. That’s the way Mom raised me.”

This is the fourth 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. 9, 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>.