



Media Release

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Restored vision enables Newport man to serve others and win award

Surgery and contacts restored the vision – and the dream – of Billy Harrison of Newport. He remembers as a small child visiting his father at work and hoping to follow in his footsteps at Taylor Made Ambulance.

Because of his determination to overcome adversity and succeed at work, Harrison 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). The award presentation will be made at the noon meeting of the Newport Lions Club on December 6, at the Newport Country Club.

Harrison is one of only 13 people in Arkansas who will receive an area award and was chosen from the area that includes Craighead, Clay, Lawrence, Greene, Poinsett, Woodruff, and Jackson counties.

His employer, Taylor Made Ambulance, has been named as the area Employer of the Year as an outstanding business partner for its commitment to promoting the employment of persons with vision impairment. Taylor Made Ambulance is a manufacturer of custom-designed ambulances, rescue trucks, wheelchair vans, command vehicles, and other specialty emergency vehicles. Taylor Made is one of the ten largest ambulance builders in the country.

Harrison's father started as a mechanic for the company and later became a watchman. Like his father, Harrison worked his way up. "I started as a night watchman. I went from situation to situation. There's not much I haven't done here," Harrison said. He is now an administrative assistant. He's proud of the work the company does and can't imagine working somewhere else. "Once you get into the ambulance business, it stays in your blood."

When Harrison became legally blind, he was concerned about his career. He had cataracts on both eyes and needed surgery. “I didn’t know how I’d get it done. I couldn’t afford it.” A doctor referred him to DSB, which paid for his surgeries, contacts and related expenses.

“It was amazing. I had this big screen TV and I thought it was going out – that it was broken. After my surgeries, it was like I had a brand new TV. It wasn’t something wrong with the TV; it was something wrong with my eyes,” Harrison said. Since then, he has referred other people to DSB for help with their vision problems.

When he’s not at work, Harrison helps raise his sister’s grandchildren. One of them lives with him, so his life is filled with Girl Scouts, cheer practice and other pursuits of a 10-year-old girl. He is also a Turner Classic Movie buff.

This is the fifth year that DSB has given Consumer of the Year achievement awards. At the end of the year, the DSB Board will select an overall state winner from the area winners who were nominated.

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>.