



Media Release

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Batesville man fights eye disease to save his business, wins area award

Despite a progressive eye disease, Charles “Chuck” Jones of Batesville was determined to find ways to keep his small business, Southern Service Heat and Air. A series of surgeries restored his eyesight.

“I feel like I’m the luckiest man in the world,” Jones said. “I would have been housebound. Things were looking pretty bleak. I would have had to give up my business. I love my work, being in the heat and air business. I enjoy the freedom of working for myself.”

Because of his determination and success, Jones 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 was chosen from the area including Independence, Izard, Stone, Cleburne, Randolph, White, and Sharp counties. Jones is one of only 13 people in Arkansas who will receive an area award. An overall state winner will be named at the end of the year.

“I was impressed with Mr. Jones, because of his perseverance through his visual difficulties,” said his DSB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Darline Tucker. “He has shown admirable motivation to keep his business running smoothly, keep his clientele satisfied, and to maintain his income even though he has faced great adversity.”

“Mr. Jones continued to work and operate his heating and air conditioning business during the entire time his case has been open with DSB. The only days he took off were for his surgeries and recovery periods, which were minimal. He even hired an assistant to drive him to his work sites and to assist him with any intricate work that he could no longer accomplish due to his declining vision,” Tucker said.

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“I love being nominated for the Consumer of the Year,” Jones said. “I feel so fortunate.” The award presentation will be made at the noon meeting of the Batesville Kiwanis Club on October 21, at Caudel’s Family Restaurant.

Jones said when he was diagnosed with Fuch's Dystrophy, a rare eye disease in which cells lining the inner surface of the cornea slowly start to die, he told his doctors that he didn’t have insurance to pay for the treatments and surgeries. The disease usually affects both eyes. Dr. Ronald L. Lowery of Batesville and Dr. Michael Roberson of Baptist Eye Clinic told Jones about DSB and its services. “It saved my life no doubt,” he said.

Jones was eventually able to have corneal transplants in both of his eyes. More recently Jones faced additional laser surgeries on his eyes. Now his vision is restored, and he only wears eyeglasses.

Jones said that he “is very thankful” to DSB for its role in helping him keep his vision and his business. He said the experience has given him greater empathy towards others less fortunate, and he makes efforts to help the elderly and disabled.

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>.