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HORIZONS

SOUTH CAROLINA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION DEPARTMENT

SCVRD mourns loss of agency board member

Henry James, a 19th-century philosopher, once said, "Three things in human life are important: The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. And the third is to be kind."

J. Hewlette Wasson lived these words until he died on September 17, 1995, at Greenville Memorial Medical Center.

From 1977 until his death, Wasson served as a member of the South Carolina State Agency of Vocational Rehabilitation, the governing body of the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department. He represented the 5th Congressional District.

And, as every SCVRD employee who had the pleasure of knowing the Judge can attest, 82-year-old Wasson never failed to show each of us his special kindness. No matter how busy his schedule, he would always take an extra moment to stop, to speak and to ask about our health and our families.

He was as sincere in his kindness to SCVRD employees as he was in his lifetime advocacy for individuals with disabilities.

How does a person become so kind — so genuine? Perhaps the experiences of his own life helped forge his personality. For on his 16th birthday, his life changed forever.

After several days of back pain, young Wasson lay down for what was only supposed to be a short nap. He woke up paralyzed.

The experiences he went through after that, as an individual newly physically disabled, changed his life and inspired him to become part of the rehabilitation movement.

Wasson even received services from the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department shortly

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Former Governor Carroll A. Campbell Jr. (center) shares a moment with E. Roy Stone Jr. (left), chairman of the State Agency of Vocational Rehabilitation, and agency member J. Hewlette Wasson at a dedication ceremony.

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J. Hewlette Wasson

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after becoming disabled. His vocational rehabilitation counselor was a man with one leg, who personally inspired Wasson. He encouraged him to go to college and to pursue all the other goals he had before becoming disabled.

Wasson did. He graduated from Presbyterian College in 1938. After graduation, he successfully ran for the position of probate judge.

During his 38-year-long career as probate judge, Wasson pushed for the reform of the mental health law and assisted in drawing up and getting passed legislation requiring public buildings to have ramps and requiring schools to provide an education for individuals with physical disabilities.

After he retired as probate judge, he worked in private legal practice.

Wasson served individuals with disabilities in countless other ways. He held the position of president of the South Carolina Chapter of the National Rehabilitation Association for years. And, since 1939, he actively worked with the Easter Seal Society of South Carolina Inc., even serving on their board.

During his lifetime, Governor Carroll A. Campbell Jr. presented Wasson with the Order of the Palmetto and in 1988, SCVRD honored Wasson by naming its building which houses the area's vocational rehabilitation program, the Hewlette Wasson Building. The building is located on Highway 76 between Clinton and Laurens.

Wasson also served his community in many different ways. He was a member of the Laurens County Bar Association, member and former president of the Clinton Kiwanis Club with 47 years of perfect attendance, a member and former elder and Sunday School teacher of the First Presbyterian Church in Laurens.

The South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department will miss you, Judge.

Cryovac to build new $50 million manufacturing facility

Cryovac, which currently employs 135 people in its state-of-the-art Seneca manufacturing facility, will build a new 130,800-square-foot manufacturing facility on its 105-acre site.

Cryovac is a division of W.R. Grace & Co., a global leader in flexible packaging and specialty chemicals. The facility produces flexible plastic packaging materials.

Cryovac President W.B. "Bill" Sturgis made the announcement of the new $50 million facility on Thursday, Oct. 26, 1995.

P. Charles LaRosa Jr., commissioner of the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department; Preston Coleman, SCVRD assistant commissioner; Lillian N. Rochester, Oconee-Pickens VR area supervisor; Richard K. Dixon, Oconee-Pickens Work Training Center supervisor; and others attended the event where Cryovac management praised the Vocational Rehabilitation Department.

For the last four years Cryovac has contracted with the Oconee-Pickens Work Training Center. About four to five clients work on the contract daily and this contract will soon produce over $100,000 a year.

Cryovac even brought in representatives from their Malaysia facilities to the Oconee-Pickens Work Training Center to observe.

"The work we do is an integral part of Cryovac's daily film production process," said Dixon, training center supervisor.

"For Cryovac to produce the film, we have to provide them with precisely cut cores in up to 14 different sizes. Each core gets a corresponding computer-generated label that allows Cryovac to track that particular roll throughout its use."

Cryovac faxes orders to the work training center. These orders contain precise instructions explaining how to place the orders in the custom-made buggies. Each buggy typically holds two different orders.

The center's clients must place the corresponding labels carefully. Later, at Cryovac, a robotic arm retrieves the correctly labeled carton and inserts the film that matches that order.

Cryovac's Seneca Team Leader Randall V. Bodie praised the local Vocational Rehabilitation center for providing ongoing direct support of the Cryovac Seneca operations.

Upon completion of the new manufacturing facility, Cryovac will have approximately 200 employees at its Oconee County facilities. Cryovac, which has its North American headquarters at Duncan, employs more than 2,700 people in upstate South Carolina.

Dixon reflected, "With this incredible growth comes tremendous opportunity — opportunity for our sister work training centers to work together to better serve not only Cryovac's needs but also the needs of the clients and the citizens of South Carolina.

"In fact, we are preparing to network with the Anderson Work Training Center. They will assume some of our current production while we will concentrate on cores and cartons needed for the new Cryovac facility."

Dixon adds, "The Cryovac work is turnaround-driven, quality-oriented and representative of what is going on today in fast-paced global markets. We are definitely headed into the 21st century with this contract and opening new doors.

"Better yet, this contract work helps us accomplish our evaluation and adjustment goals and that is, after all, what our work training centers are all about. And, if we can be a valuable and integral part of industry's long-range plans in the process, that's all the better."

Clients cut paper tubes into cores of 14 different sizes and label boxes for Cryovac in the Oconee-Pickens VR Work Training Center. Cryovac, a division of W.R. Grace & Co., produces flexible plastic packaging materials and specialty chemicals used in food and consumer goods packaging.

Alexander reaches out to students

It's a typical Monday morning mandatory assembly at Riverside High School in Spartanburg.

Over 1,000 students file in and take their seats. It's Red Ribbon Week and they've come to hear yet another speaker talk statistics about the evils of driving under the influence of alcohol and other drugs.

Instead they meet vibrant Kim Elizabeth Alexander, extension associate and faculty member for the Department of Family and Youth Development at Clemson University and a paraplegic.

Alexander starts out telling them about herself. As she talks, she projects slides of herself as a little girl on a large screen.

As a toddler in one, she pedals a tricycle furiously down the road. In another, still small, she poses in her best Sunday dress. More slides flash on the screen — dressed for a high school formal. Another one shows her in her basketball uniform.

"I was real athletic," she says. "I had a full basketball scholarship to go to a junior college and I was quick."

During this very personal conversation and slide presentation, Alexander tells them how a 1979 car accident drastically altered her life.

She stresses the need to make good decisions and the painful and sometimes permanent consequences of not thinking through your actions.

"I was a senior in high school. I was 18. It was senior cut day. I made a decision to get into a car with people who had been drinking and I didn't think anything about it."

Her audience listens intently.

How did Alexander get here from that senior cut day?

After her accident, Alexander spent three months at the Roger C. Peace Rehabilitation Institute in Greenville.

Later she went on to Craig Hospital in Denver, Colorado. There she learned to adapt to her new situation.

She couldn't walk and had limited use of her hands.

"And after my paralysis it was like, 'Well, what are you going to do?'" she recalled.

That's when Alexander met Lillian Rochester who served as her counselor and who now supervises the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department's Oconee-Pickens area office.

Alexander reflected, "I don't remember if voc rehab sought me out or if I needed to talk to them. They immediately talked about my level

"I've heard people say, 'I'm the same as I was on my feet.' I don't agree with that. I'm not the same as I was. I may appear to look the same but I think what I had as an individual, the qualities, I think I've enhanced them to become kind of a more in-depth person, a more detailed person. I want to get beyond the surface. I question a lot and I search for answers."

A teacher at Riverside High School in Spartanburg introduces Kim Alexander to an auditorium full of students who came to hear her speak about her accident and her life.

of injury and went through a series of tests."

With vocational rehabilitation's help, Alexander enrolled at Tri-County Tec and worked as a receptionist for City Hall. After completing her course work at Tec, she transferred to Clemson University.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Department provided some financial assistance and helped with her wheelchair needs.

In 1987 Alexander entered and won the Miss Wheelchair South Carolina pageant.

Alexander graduated from Clemson with a bachelor's degree in marketing in 1988. About a year later, she went to work for Clemson.

In 1992 the South Carolina Rehabilitation Association honored her with their Runner-up Case of the Year Award highlighting her progress in overcoming her disabilities.

Since then, Alexander has continued her education, earning her master's degree in counseling and guidance services from Clemson.

"I did both of my master's practicums at voc rehab working with clients and talking to the counselors," Alexander said.

Last year, she began teaching a course at Clemson on addictions education and prevention.

"I'm real excited about each of my classes," she said. "We look at addictions from different aspects. We look at what it does to you, your family and your surroundings.

"I won't make students' decisions for them, but I can give them a foundation of information and experience so that they can make more informed choices."

Alexander also provides leadership for several Clemson Extension programs including the National Red Ribbon Campaign, National 4-H Week and the State 4-H Congress.

She chairs the Clemson University Committee on Access and Accommodations for Individuals with Disabilities.

"Out of that comes a lot of opportunities for me," she said. "I spoke to the President's Advisory Council spouses. I conducted a program for them to let them know how Clemson was complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

"I work with lawyers and others and present the human side in ADA seminars. I let them see that without ADA, I wouldn't have been able to go on to college much less get a master's and pursue my career."

Alexander was recently awarded a grant to create a highway traffic safety curriculum for 4-H that will be used in schools and other settings across the state.

Alexander hopes that her presentations at local schools somehow touch the lives of her audiences.

"You get only an hour with 500 students," Alexander reflects. "You know you want to give them the most because you may never get that chance again."

Guyanese lineman builds new career in South Carolina after injury

When Gordon McRae reports to work on the 14th floor of the Palmetto Center office building in uptown Columbia each day, it is not the picture he visualized from a hospital bed in his native Guyana four years ago.

"It looked like the end of the road," said McRae, who lost his right arm and left leg in an accident while working as an emergency crew lineman with the Guyana Electric Company in South America.

In the summer of 1991, McRae touched a hot wire and suffered severe burns.

McRae's job required physical dexterity, agility and strength. Always an active person, now he could not walk, lift, carry, bend or climb without help.

To make matters worse, he had no opportunity for rehabilitation in Guyana.

"Guyana is a very poor country. Opportunities are very limited there even for someone without a disability," McRae said.

McRae knew he would have to leave his homeland if he ever wanted to work again, so he came to South Carolina to live with his sister and her husband.

He applied for vocational rehabilitation services from the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department in May of 1992.

His VR counselor, Patricia J. Sloan (who now supervises the Columbia Vocational Rehabilitation Work Training Center), provided counseling and guidance.

Sloan arranged for McRae to get services at the department's Center for Comprehensive Programs in West Columbia.

Gordon McRae (center) and his VR counselor Patricia J. Sloan accept the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department's Runner-up Case of the Year Awards presented by SCVRD agency board member Harry W. Findley at the 1995 meeting of the South Carolina Rehabilitation Association.

There, he received a prosthesis for his leg and, at the Muscular Development Center, he worked on strength and endurance.

Through great determination he learned to walk for the second time in his life.

McRae passed the high school diploma equivalency test and began rebuilding his career in the United States.

Testing at the Evaluation Center revealed McRae's occupational strengths and an aptitude for computer work.

He applied for admission to the department's Computer Training Program, which trains persons with disabilities for careers in computer-related occupations.

After a successful screening by the program's Business Advisory Council, McRae began classes in computer aided drafting.

"I had never touched a computer before," he said. "At first it was a bit scary, but I liked it."

He excelled quickly, too, according to W. Robert Martin Jr., who provides counseling and job placement help for students in the program.

"From day one, Gordon made every effort to excel," said Martin. "Not only was he dealing with the culture shock of moving to the United States, but also he was dealing with totally unfamiliar technology. But he grasped it in a very short time."

When McRae completed the seven-month-long course, Martin helped him land a job with South Carolina Electric & Gas Company as a contract draftsman through Midwest Technical.

McRae finds it ironic that his first new career opportunity came from a power company, given that his injuries happened while repairing an electrical transformer.

"My knowledge as a lineman has helped me a lot in this job," he said.

McRae's outstanding attitude and encouraging remarks affect others — those with and without disabilities. His positive attitude helps him overcome the down times like the company picnic where he watched others play basketball and volleyball and swim, things he used to do.

"The things I can't do I try not to worry about. The things I can do I give my best at all times," he said.

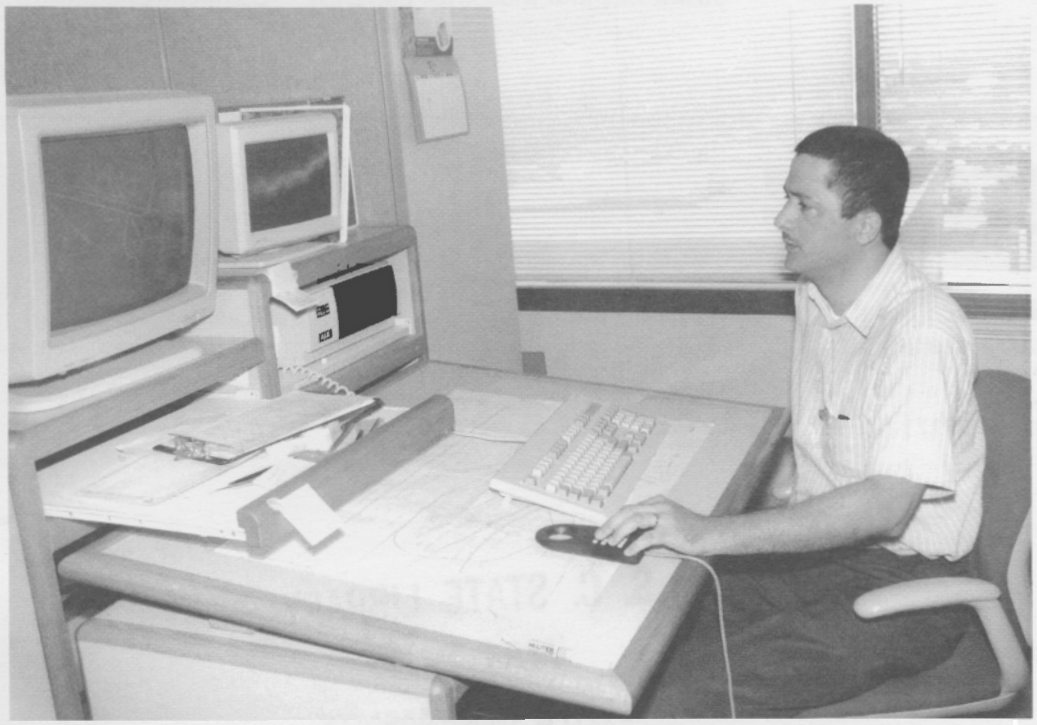
In 1994 the Columbia Mayor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities recognized McRae's success by naming him its President's Trophy award winner. The committee gives this award to an outstanding employee with a disability.

In 1995, McRae received the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department's Runner-up Case of the Year Award given at the annual meeting of the South Carolina Rehabilitation Association.

The annual case of the year awards recognize the department's clients who make the most progress in overcoming their disabilities and the counselors who most contribute to that progress.

McRae says the services and encouragement he received from vocational rehabilitation made a big difference in his life. He also knows that employers really determine just how far people with disabilities go in the future.

McRae hopes employers focus on the talent available, not the circumstances. He says, "I don't want sympathy. Don't hire me because you feel sorry for me. I want to be employed because I have ability."



Gordon McRae works on a drafting project at SCE&G. Following a serious accident in Guyana, McRae learned computer skills at the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department.

Contracts keep it going!

These photographs show just a few of the products South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department's Work Training Center clients make or service for business and industry.

The foreground of the photograph below shows a contract with Homelite, a contract in the Rock Hill Work Training Center. In this contract, clients drill holes, disassemble plugs, connect wires, insert switches, install covers, label and test generators.

The photograph on the right plainly shows the Lancaster Work Training Center's contracts with College Flags/Tag Express (formerly College Flags Inc.).

In one contract the Lancaster center clients burn holes in the binding of sewn car flags, install grommets, attach flags to poles, label flags and box flags. This contract runs about 10 months and involves from 12 to 20 clients.

In another year-long contract with the same company, 12 to 15 of the center's clients separate and package pennants in four basic sizes.

More than 500 South Carolina businesses and industries currently provide contract work for our work training centers. This contract work provides real-work training experiences that help the clients develop work traits they need to succeed in competitive employment.

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