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# HORIZONS

SOUTH CAROLINA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION DEPARTMENT

## *Payroll, HR functions to go live on SCEIS*

The S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department will complete the transition to the S.C. Enterprise Information System (SCEIS) in June when the agency switches its payroll and human resources functions to the web-based software.

SCVRD will be among the 30 state agencies to “go live” on June 2. Employees will be paid out of the system for the first time on July 1.

After June 2, employees will be able to access their personal information, get copies of their pay statements, update tax information and manage their direct deposit accounts simply by logging on to the secure system with their user ID and password and selecting the

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## SPICE program prepares inmates for employment

Finding a job in a distressed economy is difficult for anyone, but for someone just coming out of jail, it may seem impossible.

The SPICE (Self-Paced In-Classroom Education) Program is helping to change that.

A collaborative effort among the state departments of Vocational Rehabilitation; Probation, Parole and Pardon; and Corrections; and Midlands, Piedmont, Greenville and Trident technical colleges, the program prepares inmates for employment and helps them find a job when they get out.

It is operating at four correctional institutions—Tyger River in Enoree; Leath in Greenwood; Broad River in Columbia; and McDougall in Ridgeville.

The three-pronged approach encompasses the physical, with a training regimen based on that used by the U.S. Army; the mental, with classes and training geared toward employment; and the spiritual, which relies on faith-based organizations to provide mentors and support.

Inmates may apply to the program and be interviewed for acceptance; be nominated by a warden or guard; or be paroled to the program with the possibility of release on successful completion. It’s not available for inmates convicted of violent or sexual crimes.

Each class lasts 18 weeks, with 15 inmates in a class. Once in the program, the inmates live together so they develop camaraderie, said Steve Patterson, SCVRD SPICE coordinator.

All four institutions have a GED preparatory program and use WorkKeys,

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*A SPICE graduate does evaluations and clerical work for an eye-care center.*

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# VR, DDS step up assistance for veterans with disabilities

More than 1,300 injured South Carolina veterans who want to return to work are expected to seek vocational rehabilitation services this year.

So the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation general program and Disability Determination Services are stepping up efforts to assist soldiers returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) has been called the “signature wound” of both conflicts. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and combat stress injuries rank second on the list. Co-occurring illnesses, substance abuse and depression also are factors.

All of these veterans need help reintegrating into society and many need to find employment.

While the Veterans Administration has programs in place to assist them, restrictions sometimes slow the process.

“Soldiers applying for federal VR services first must have their federal disability percentage, which takes time,” said Felicia Johnson, SCVRD Richland area supervisor.

“We are trying to provide services immediately because we’re not under the same restrictions.”

Staff members from the Richland office are working with the Warriors in Transition program at Ft. Jackson, which serves injured soldiers who are being discharged.

Presentations detailing VR services are done once a month and Ft. Jackson may soon become an itinerant site where a counselor will go weekly to talk with soldiers about VR services, Johnson said.

Members of the Veterans Administrations’ TBI unit have toured the TBI program at SCVRD’s Comprehensive Center’s with positive results, she said.

Meanwhile, DDS is expediting applications for disability benefits from wounded soldiers.

DDS gives priority to all claims received on military casualties, regardless of whether the soldier is assigned to the Warrior in Transition Unit. A DDS liaison monitors pending military casualty claims to make sure they are processed as quickly as possible.

## SPICE

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a job-skills assessment system. Each participant also must take a 14-week course on the impact of crime on victims.

Depending on the institution, training is available in areas such as bricklaying, carpentry, auto body repair, horticulture, electrical wiring, small engine repair, food preparation, and heating and air conditioning. The technical colleges

supply the teachers.

SCVRD has made a commitment to work with the inmates “behind the fence,” so when they get out, they’re ready to go to work, Patterson said. Some have gone through the Skilled Workforce Apprenticeship Training (SWAT) program to successfully transition into employment.

Lewis Stewart, Upstate SPICE coordinator who retired from

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# Client turns positive attitude into career

You could call Jerry Missouri a jack-of-all-trades. He's done lawn care, carpentry, painting, plumbing, cleaning, worked with sheetrock and driven forklifts. Odd jobs, mostly.

When he came to the Camden SCVRD office a year ago, he was looking for something more permanent.

He entered job-readiness training at the Camden work training center's wood shop to improve his communication and work skills, said Leonard Stallings, Camden center manager.

That's when they discovered Missouri couldn't read a tape measure. It didn't stop him though.

"He picked it up and he did real well," Stallings said.

Transportation was an issue because his car kept breaking down, "but he always found a way to get here," Stallings said.

In November, Biological Solutions in Bishopville was looking for some temporary help. Amie Maresca, Human Resources manager and co-owner with husband Benny, had been to an open house at the Camden office and thought of VR.

She talked with Tom Stabler, SCVRD business development specialist for the area, and Clifford Brooks, a vocational assessment and career exploration specialist, about the need. Missouri and three other clients were sent to work at the plant.

Biological Solutions makes all-natural cleaning fluids, food additives and soil remediation

products for private labels. Benny Maresca is a chemist by trade and prides himself on being able to tailor a product to a client's needs.

The VR clients made a big impression.

"You could tell they'd been trained," Amie Maresca said. "They were on time—they actually showed up! Their

work ethic was a different ballgame" from what the company had experienced with temporary workers in the past.

The crunch was over by Christmas, but Missouri had done such a good job, the Marescas decided to keep him on as an apprentice under the SWAT (Skilled Workforce Apprenticeship Training) program.

He was officially hired April 5 as assistant batch maker, helping to mix chemical compounds for various products.

"When Jerry finishes his job, he'll start sweeping and cleaning," Amie Maresca said. "He's got such a positive attitude and he's so conscientious, it's refreshing."

Benny Maresca explained that because the company makes

food additives, it has to meet FDA standards and cleanliness is essential.

Missouri set such a good example for his co-workers, he was named the company's first Employee of the Month in January even though he wasn't yet on the payroll. He's going to put the \$400 bonus toward a new car.

"It was deservedly received,"



*Jerry Missouri mixes chemicals at Biological Solutions.*

said Aime Maresca. "His punctuality, attendance, attitude and ability to work with others is over and beyond what we could expect."

Missouri grins broadly when asked about his performance.

I catch on quick," he said, "and I got to keep it clean."

"He's a good representative for placing other clients," Stallings said.

# SCADES hosts regional conference

The S.C. Association of Disability Evaluation Specialists turned on the Southern hospitality recently as it played host to the National Association of Disability Examiners' 2010 Regional Training Conference.

The conference, held at the Francis Marion Hotel in downtown Charleston, attracted about 130 participants from the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic and Southeast regions of NADE.

Blake Monson, Disability Determination Services' Charleston regional supervisor, received the Barry Cooper Leadership Award from SCADES. He was recognized for his "stellar performance, consummate professionalism,

dedicated services and inspired leadership."

Monson's ability to draw together the staff members' various strengths has made the Charleston office one of the highest performing in the state, the citation said.

Dr. Iwana Ridgill, a favorite at the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Association meeting three years ago, was the keynote speaker. Training sessions included psychological and medical



**Blake Monson, right, accepts the Barry Cooper Leadership Award from Chris Porter, SCADES president and DDS regional supervisor in Greenville.**

topics for people working in the Social Security disability evaluation and Medicaid professions in addition to updates on how Social Security changes might impact their jobs.

Charleston's combination of good food, historical location and abundant activities helped make the conference a hit, said Dr. Lisa Varner, a psychologist in the Charleston DDS office who coordinated the event along with Cindia Deith, disability development specialist in the Office of State Claims in Lexington.

"It was the first conference I've ever done; it was a real learning experience," Varner said. "But I had a great committee and there was incredible teamwork. People did an amazing job."

Next year's regional training conference will be in Newport, Rhode Island, in May.



## **SCADES members at NADE conference**

**Members of the South Carolina Association of Disability Evaluation Specialists who attended the NADE conference are, back row from left, Margaret Yeats, Shirley Jarrett, Yvonne Wilson, Chris Porter, Mark Hayden, Dr. Debbie Price, Israel Rivers, Sylvester Jackson, Allison Toy and Blake Monson. In the middle row from left are Christee Hunt, Dr. Joyce Broadus-Lewis, Ann Payne, Megan Ward and Ben Overholser. In the front row from left are Cindia Deith, Cassandra Highsmith, Dr. Xanthia Harkness, Dr. Lisa Varner, Mary Carroll and Glenda McMichael-Hawkins.**

# VR partner wins workforce award

North American Rescue, LLC, a member of the VR Business Partnership Network, was named the Small Employer of the Year recently at the 2010 Palmetto Workforce Partnership Awards Conference.

The Greer-based company specializes in emergency tactical evacuation products and medical convenience kits for the military, tactical law enforcement professionals, firefighters, and emergency health care professionals.

Through an outsource agreement with the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department, VR clients assemble and pack combat medical supplies for its Unconventional Medic division. SCVRD nominated NAR for the award.

The company's North American Rescue Foundation has donated \$15 million over the last eight years to help military personnel in need.

SCVRD's other nominees for the Small Employer of the Year (0-50 employees) were AM Conservation Group Inc. of Charleston; Scott's Auto Repair of West Columbia; and



**Bob Castellani, left, vice chairman, and Jim Carino, right, vice president of operations at North American Rescue show off their award along with SCVRD Commissioner Barbara Hollis and business development specialist Peter Foley.**

the Screenprint Factory of Aiken.

In the Medium Employer (51-500 employees), SCVRD nominated Parker Hannifin Corp., Racor Division, of Moncks Corner; and S.C. Metal Products, LLC, of Aiken.

In the Large Employer (501+ employees), SCVRD nominated Bridgestone America's Tire Operations of Aiken; Fujifilm North

America Corp. of Greenwood; and The Spinx Co. of Greenville.

In all, more than 100 businesses were nominated for the annual awards. Among the criteria used in selecting the winners are quality of the work environment, impact on the community's quality of life, and support for human growth and development in the workplace.

## SCEIS

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category they wish to enter.

They'll also be able to manage leave and travel through the system.

"Employees and supervisors will have greater access to information in SCEIS, but will have greater responsibility for ensuring that information is accurate and up to date," said Eric Moore, SCVRD Human Resources director.

Meanwhile, the finance/procurement/materials management transition to SCEIS that began Nov. 2 is ongoing. After some initial bumps in the road, the process is being refined to improve effectiveness.

SCEIS replaces the outdated systems that have been used to manage essential functions such as purchasing, payroll, human resources, travel approvals and financial management, which are aging rapidly and at risk for failure.

"By combining several of the state's legacy systems into one statewide system, SCEIS will improve the accuracy of data by doing away with the need to enter the same data in more than one place," according to state Budget and Control Board's division of State Information Technology.

"At the same time, the state has the opportunity to improve efficiency by standardizing some of the processes used by the agencies today."

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**SPICE**

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SCVRD after 33 years, said his background translates well to his second job.

"I get to know the inmates and use my contacts to pair them up with employers for a successful match," he said.

He works closely with VR counselors to teach interviewing and job skills, holds mini job fairs and even takes graduates to interviews and arranges for transitional housing after they are released.

Frank Cser, SPICE coordinator at McDougall, said he "can't speak highly enough of VR participation."

Since 2007, when the SPICE

program began at McDougall, 96 inmates have completed the program and only a handful has gone back to jail, Cser said.

"It's a very popular program, and it's helped to cut down the recidivism rate," he said.

The statistics bear that out, Patterson said. Only 5 percent of SPICE participants go back to jail after three years, while the recidivism rate for the general inmate population is 50 percent.

George Whitehead, director of Mentoring Programs for Probation, Parole and Pardon, said SPICE has been a tremendous help in terms of supervising inmates who are on probation or parole.

"They're more employable, they already have a mentor and their accountability is good," he said.

"They're our stars."

In the year and a half VR has been involved with SPICE, 442 cases have been opened, 139 have been closed successfully and 80 have been closed unsuccessfully. The rest remain open.

"The VR success rate has gone up to 70 percent this year," Patterson said. "As each class goes through, we have more and more success."

The state-funded program has a \$350,000 budget.

"It costs \$22,000 to house an inmate for a year," Patterson said. "After they go through the program, they go to work and pay taxes. It saves [the state] money and makes a real difference for their families."