VR streamlining wins national award

Chalk this one up to team effort in “making the best better.”

As Gov. David Beasley honored the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department for its latest national award—a Certificate of Special Recognition in the 1998 Public Service Excellence Awards program—Commissioner P. Charles LaRosa Jr. made it clear that all the department’s employees deserved to be there.

The awards, coordinated by the Public Service Roundtable in Washington, D.C., went to federal, state and local agencies for setting the highest standards of teamwork, excellence and innovation in providing public service.

The department was recognized for streamlining its service-delivery system and for emphasizing results rather than process in enabling eligible citizens to prepare for, achieve and maintain competitive employment.

Award presentation

SCVRD’s senior staff was on hand May 19 to receive the Public Service Excellence Award during a short ceremony in the Governor’s Office. From left are Lucerne Iseman, Bud Harrelson, Allen Gantt, Gov. David Beasley, Pete Howell, P. Charles LaRosa Jr., Preston Coleman, David Lever, Larry Bryant, Pat Green and Jeb Batten.

The Public Service Roundtable chose only 11 agencies from among 200 nominations for national awards or special recognition.

LaRosa praised the dedication to excellence of SCVRD staff across the state, and took pride in the fact that the nomination for the award came from the Office of the Governor.

W. Jefferson Bryson, director of constituent services in the governor’s office, wrote in his letter of nomination that, “as an advocate for more effective and efficient public service among State agencies, without a doubt, the most user friendly and responsive agency we have here is the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department.

“...When I meet with typical resistance to change among managers of public agencies, SCVR is the example I use to demonstrate how business ‘can be, and ought to be’ conducted.”
New enthusiasm marks SCVRA’s first meeting

A new spirit of enthusiasm marked the inaugural meeting of the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Association in March.

“There was a sense of excitement about the organization that mirrors the excitement in the agency,” said Pete Howell, SCVRA board president, who also is an assistant commissioner for the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department.

U.S. Rep. Lindsey O. Graham, a strong supporter of South Carolina vocational rehabilitation, was keynote speaker for the meeting.

SCVRA is a new organization focused on the public vocational rehabilitation program and affiliated with the American RehabACTion Network.

The new SCVRA has a membership of 415 and boasted an attendance of more than 300 a day at the annual meeting.

Most of the SCVRA members are department employees.

“The department recognizes that the staff is the greatest asset in fulfilling its mission,” Howell said. “The new look (of the association) reflects the changes that have gone on in the VR department.”

Board officers also include: Derle Lowder of Sumter, a member of the State Agency of Vocational Rehabilitation board, vice president; Laura Spears, office manager at Winsboro, secretary; Preston Coleman, SCVRD assistant commissioner, treasurer; and Lucerne Iseman, supervisor, Center for Comprehensive Programs, State Office liaison.

Board members are: Dr. Marvin Efron, Eye Associates of Cayce-West Columbia; Sally Daniel, Conway area supervisor; Larry McNeil, production manager, Marlboro Work Training Center; Janice Roberts, administrative assistant, Spartanburg; Robert Oppermann, project supervisor, Holmesview Center; Maggie Wright, counselor, Sumter; Fred Lord, project supervisor, Columbia sub-office; Cindi McDuffie, vocational evaluator, Florence Work Training Center; Fred Thompson, counselor, Charleston; Elaine Childers, rehabilitation associate, Anderson; Paula Ruark, senior program analyst, DDD Central Office.

Division presidents are: Fred Lord, Administrators Association; Cindi McDuffie, Facilities Service Providers Association; Fred Thompson, Counselors Association; Elaine Childers, Association of Vocational Rehabilitation Support Staff; Robert Oppermann, Professional Staff Association; and Paula Ruark, Disability Determination Association.
Persistence pays off for Client of Year

Anthony Ritter was a team project for the Walterboro office, so when he was named 1997 Client of the Year, the staff was there to cheer him on.

Ritter, who has cerebral palsy, came to the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department in January 1985, determined not to spend the rest of his life collecting a disability check.

But his spastic gait and lack of muscular strength made him an unlikely candidate for competitive employment, especially in rural Allendale County.

Ritter refused to take no for an answer and set out to prove himself, first to the VR staff and then to the world. His first challenge was convincing then center manager Paul Mears that he could drive a forklift. After that, Mears never had another doubt.

From there, Ritter added van driver to his list of achievements and then truck driver. Ritter became the “minuteman” for the center, picking up and delivering contract materials, running errands and doing whatever else needed doing.

He continually applied for outside jobs, but kept running into his biggest obstacle—the preconceived notion that he couldn’t do it; that he might get hurt and be an insurance liability.

After an 11-year struggle, Mears heard about an opening at Palex Inc., a Walterboro pallet company. They needed a forklift operator and Ritter fit the bill.

Cause for celebration

Anthony Ritter had plenty of support from the Walterboro staff when he received his award. From left, are Willie Rabb, Beth Hudson, Kathy Way Shider, Paul Mears, Lynn Bagnal, Ritter and his mother, Mary Ritter, Arnie Green and Sandy Craven.

SCVRA, division award winners named

Business Partnership Awards


Local Case of the Year Awards

Aiken—Rashidi Fawcett; Anderson—Larry Gray; Beaufort—Nathaniel Morgan; Berkeley-Dorchester—Daniel Flippo; Camden—Laura Spears; Columbia—Roy Hewett; Conway—Kenyon Faircloth; Florence—Christy Crochet; Greenville—Gayle Mason; Greenwood—Lisa Malone; Lancaster—Janet Catoe; Laurens—Jake Arant; Marlboro—Frankie Whaley; Oconee-Pickens—Kathleen Hane; Orangeburg—Randy Pluta; Rock Hill—Carolyn Rowland; Spartanburg—Sarah Cannon; Statewide Facilities—William Davis Jr.; Sumter—Lee McCall.

Division Awards

Association of Vocational Rehabilitation Support Staff—Kay Stover, counselor assistant, Charleston; Professional Staff Association—Kerry Mandeville, client services consultant, State Office; Vocational Rehabilitation Facilities Service Providers’ Association—Nancy Mitchum, rehabilitation associate, Berkeley-Dorchester.
His case was closed successfully in March 1997. Mears received the 1997 Case of the Year Award.

Runner-up Client of the Year was Lorraine Addison of Charleston. Her counselor, Fred Thompson, received the Runner-up Case of the Year Award.

Addison has been profoundly deaf since childhood and had real trouble understanding and accepting the responsibility of a job. After almost a decade of employment failure, she was ready to take advantage of the opportunities at SCVRD.

A hearing aid, work adjustment training, a job coach, some work-site adjustments and Thompson’s support proved to be a winning combination.

She was hired as a biscuit maker at Hardee’s and has since moved on to salad preparation at Ryan’s.

Her case also was closed in March 1997.

Kay Chumley is the recipient of the first Commissioner’s Award for Exceptional Customer Service. Chumley, an information specialist in the Charleston area office, was cited for continually striving to deliver the best customer service possible.

Among her efforts, she:

• has been a key contributor to Charleston’s Customer Service Plan;
• has developed a community resources directory for staff use;
• asks clients to fill out “Cultivating True Livelihood” questionnaires while they wait for appointments;
• created the “Employee of the Moment” Award for staff members caught in the act of providing exceptional customer service;
• provides crayons and coloring books for children waiting for their parents; and
• posts thoughts for the day that inspire clients and staff to strive for excellence.

Other candidates, nominated by their peers, included: John McMurtrie, Aiken; Larry Gray, Anderson; Cheryl Hudgens, Anderson; Deborah Harriott, Beaufort; Nancy Mitchum, Berkeley-Dorchester; Debra Temples, Columbia; Cindi McDuffie, Florence.

Also, Peggy Neal, Greenwood; Jackie Hicks, Lancaster; Richard Cobb, Laurens; Robert Griggs, Marlboro; George Hands, Oconee-Pickens; Angela Jamison, Orangeburg; Mylinder Luke, Palmetto Center; Carolyn Hodge, Spartanburg; and Lee McCall, Sumter.

Groups nominated were: the Case Services Division, State Office; the Customer Service training teams; the Evaluation Center dietary staff; and the Dream Team, Greenville.