



SCVRD wishes you Happy Holidays!

Volume 46, Number 4

NEW

Fall 2007

HORIZONS

SOUTH CAROLINA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION DEPARTMENT

ITTC prepares 55 for careers

Fifty-five students graduated from the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department's Information Technology Training Center on Oct. 17.



Sen. Larry Martin addresses the graduates.

The ITTC prepares South Carolinians with significant physical disabilities for jobs in computer-related fields.

Computer Aided Drafting and Design/Geographic Information Systems, Computer Systems Technology/Programming or Personal Computer Repair/Help Desk.

The graduates successfully completed their studies in Business Applications Plus, Business-Oriented Applications,

State Sen. Larry Martin, R-Pickens, keynote speaker for the occasion, noted that personal computers were in their infancy when the ITTC program began in 1984 and that the program has developed around the explosive growth of the PC since then.

He saluted the program's Business Advisory Council members for their "crucial" role in keeping the program up to date. BAC members are area business representatives who know the specific skills required for employment in the information technology field. They play an active role in all phases of the program, including course development, candidate selection, instruction, candidate progress, intern training, mentor development, job placement and follow-up.



Carroll

And Martin praised the graduates for their "ambition, enthusiasm, and willingness to accept challenge."

"This place changed my life," said class speaker Jeff Carroll, a PC Repair/Help Desk graduate.

Carroll said he had not worked in eight years when he came into the program last year. He walked off the graduation stage into a new career as a help desk analyst.

"Everyone here was very accepting," he said in praise of the staff. "I was able to concentrate on learning and not worry about other things."

The graduates will make a projected average starting salary of \$27,400 a year. Based on those earnings, they will pay an estimated \$399,500 a year in combined taxes.

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New Horizons is published by the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department (SCVRD), 1410 Boston Ave., P.O. Box 15, West Columbia, SC 29171-0015.

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Enabling eligible South Carolinians with disabilities to prepare for, achieve and maintain competitive employment.

2007 SERID Conference 'overwhelming' success

By TONI WILSON
Deaf & Special Services Coordinator

South Carolina was host for the 37th Southeast Regional Institute on Deafness (SERID) at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Greenville Sept. 30–Oct. 4.

SERID provides educational and professional development for individuals who work with consumers who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind and late-deafened. The conference promoted collaboration between service providers and communities serving this population.

SCVRD was the lead organizing agency, with assistance from 12 other agencies and educational institutions.

This year's conference theme, "Driving into the Future—Challenges, Changes, Choices," set the tone for a variety of topics addressing mental health, rehabilitation, education,

interpreting, accessibility, and deaf-blind issues.

One of the highlights featured students from the S.C. School for the Deaf and the Blind's Center for the Arts, who performed dance, skits, and visual art displays. The Spartanburg school also provided the color guard and drum corps for the opening ceremonies.

The conference was an overwhelming success with almost 400 participants, presenters, exhibitors, vendors and sponsors. Conference participants represented the Southeast region, including Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee, as well as many other states.

Plans for the 38th annual SERID conference, scheduled for Oct. 22–27, 2008, in Atlanta, are already under way. For more information, go to www.serid.org.



Youngsters from the S.C. School for the Deaf and the Blind show off their finger-painting skills.

Thomas always looking for bright spot

SCVRD agency board member Joey Thomas describes himself as “happy go lucky, always looking for the bright spot.”

He enjoys meeting people and trying new things.

But he needs a little help from his friends.

The 29-year-old has quadriplegia after a rock-climbing fall when he was a rising sophomore in high school. It happened during a family vacation in Cherokee, N.C.

“I fell seven stories off a waterfall,” he said.

He was taken by helicopter to a hospital in Asheville where he spent a month in the neurotrauma intensive care unit, followed by three months at the Shepherd Center rehabilitation hospital in Atlanta.

Thomas said the center had just completed a new wing for younger patients.

“There were eight or nine of us 18 or younger,” he said, and the camaraderie helped him adjust to his new situation.

The youngsters’ hometown teachers sent schoolwork and a teacher at the center would go over it with them.

Thomas didn’t miss a grade and even though he was in the homebound program when he returned home to Conway, he graduated with his class.

He came to the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department as a client in 1994.

Thomas went on to the University of South Carolina in the fall of 1995 and graduated in 2000 with a degree in information systems management.

He loves politics, according to his father. He is active in the



Joey Thomas relaxes at home

local Republican Party and is on a first-name basis with Gov. Mark Sanford. When the vacancy on the SCVRD board came open in 2004, Sanford asked if he’d be interested.

“Once I was on the board, I learned that unlike most things in South Carolina, SCVRD is one of the shining examples of what South Carolina has done right,” Thomas said.

As a former client, he brings a valuable perspective to the board. It allows him to “look through the eyes of the clients and know what they’re going through trying to find work,” he said.

Thomas recently moved out on his own with the help of a boyhood friend, Alex Smith, who lives with him, and some home health nursing care.

His mother was all for it, he said. His father, an accountant with a lumber company, is still getting used to the idea.

“I hover. I know I do,” Ken Thomas said. “But he’s pretty independent as long as somebody is close by.”

Joey Thomas is a huge NASCAR fan and has an impressive collection of Rusty Wallace model cars, from when Wallace started on the dirt tracks to when he retired from competition in 2005.

His family keeps close tabs on him. He and his father go to all the home USC football games and he’s a Carolina baseball fan as well.

These days he’s working on a web design curriculum through SCVRD’s Information Technology Training Center and hopes to go into business for himself one day.

Ken Thomas says his son has kept a positive attitude toward his disability.

“He’s been able to turn the page and hasn’t appeared to look back,” he said. “He does all he can do, and he does it very well.”

Students enjoy Disability Mentoring Day

The 43 Midlands participants in Disability Mentoring Day 2007 spread out across Richland and Lexington counties to sample careers in such diverse areas as food service, the military, the National Park Service, the National Weather Service, car repair and office technologies.

They were students from Swansea, Richland Northeast and Spring Valley high schools, Information Technology students from SCVRD, and University of South Carolina students.

The American Association of People with Disabilities sponsors the event to provide students who are potential VR clients with job-shadowing experiences and hands-on career exploration. SCVRD

coordinated the Oct. 11 activities in South Carolina.

"We had almost twice as many mentors and students involved this year," said Lucerne Iseman, project manager for the event. "It's always rewarding to see the excitement of the students and the employers."

All of the mentees had positive reviews.

"I like that I could learn more about the career that I want to be in," said Martika Asbell of Richland Northeast High School, who got a taste of hospital accounting at Lexington Medical Center.

Ronald Carter, also of Richland Northeast, went to the Columbia office of the National Weather Service.

"He really showed a lot of interest and asked a lot of good questions," said Michael Cammarata, NWS science and operations officer. "We would definitely do it again."

Other mentors included Nucor Steel, American Tool & Die, Congaree National Park, University of South Carolina Sports Medicine, Midlands Technical College, Red Lobster, the Lexington County Sheriff's Department, Ft. Jackson, Love Chevrolet, Pepsi Bottling Co., Project Hope, Pet-A-Coat Junction, Sen. Lindsey Graham's office, Olive Garden, the S.C. Retirement System, the city of Columbia, Richland County, SCANA, Colonial Supplemental Insurance and SCVRD.



Marcus Loner, left, of Swansea High, learns how to check oil levels from Sean Bush, a technician at Love Chevrolet.



Chris Strother of Swansea High gets a lesson in using the M203A grenade launcher at Ft. Jackson.



Sierra Pifer of Swansea High makes friends with a cat at Pet-A-Coat Junction.

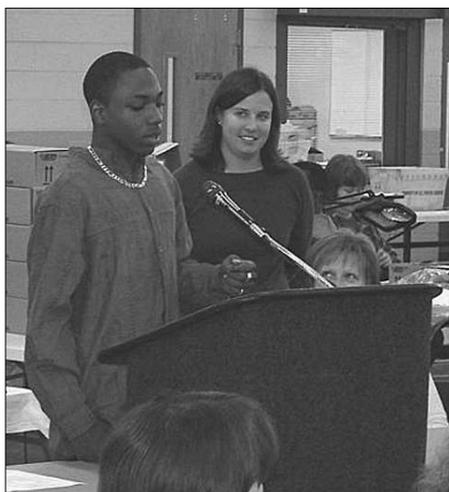


Ronald Carter, right, of Richland Northeast, gets some pointers in weather forecasting from meteorologist Leonard Vaughn at the Columbia office of the national Weather Service.

Area offices celebrate NDEA Month

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month and SCVRD areas celebrated with open houses to show off services and facilities.

Here's a sampling of activities and participants from around the state.



Gaffney client John Lipscomb, left, gives a testimonial about his VR experience during the open house luncheon. Standing next to him is Meghan Davis, an SCVRD High School/High Tech employment coach.



The Spartanburg area office recognizes the county legislative delegation for its support of VR. From left are Rep. Lanny Littlejohn, area supervisor Jennie Thomas, and Rep. Scott Talley.

From left are Berkeley-Dorchester area supervisor Kelly Rutherford; Dave Anderson of Andy Enterprise, a B-D contractor; and Darrell Chaplin acting B-D center manager.



Rock Hill center manager Jon Robinson, center, shows contract work to Rep. Herb Kirsh, left, and Rep. Jimmy Neal.



Visitors to the Laurens open house were greeted with a cheerful autumn display at the door.

Epilepsy patients have opportunity to voice concerns

People with epilepsy had a chance to voice their concerns about services that could improve their quality of life Nov. 14 at a statewide videoconference.

About 61 people came to the 15 videoconference sites, which were located at the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department's offices around the state.

Their concerns included the high costs of medications and medical insurance, transportation, and ambulance costs.

They also talked about the need

to educate employers, school personnel and the general public about epilepsy, according to Freda King, a client services specialist who represents SCVRD on the S.C. Epilepsy Study Committee.

The committee will use the information from the videoconference and from on-line surveys to develop a specific plan for a coordinated approach to service delivery for people with epilepsy.

"We want to collect all the information we can from epilepsy patients and their families," said Dr.

Braxton Wannamaker, chairman of the committee. "We also want to gather information about agencies that do or should have special services for epilepsy patients."

Anyone who could not attend the videoconference and wants to complete the survey may go to www.scepilepsyAct168.com, call (803) 798-8502 or write Epilepsy Services, P.O. Box 1165, Orangeburg, SC 29115.

The committee's final report must be submitted to the General Assembly by July 1, 2008.

2008 Journalism Contest accepting entries until Jan. 22

The 2008 Journalism Contest, sponsored by the S.C. Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, is taking entries until Jan. 22.

The contest is open to high school juniors and seniors who are between 16 and 19 years old. Students do not have to have a

disability to enter.

Entrants must write a three-page essay on "Workers with Disabilities: Talent for a Winning Team!"

A panel of professional journalists judges the contest. The winner receives a four-year scholarship to the South Carolina state-supported institution of his or her choice. The

winner also must be able to verify financial need, which may include completion of a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form.

For more information, go to www.scvrd.net/g_whatsnew.html#eventsitem1, e-mail info@scvrd.state.sc.us or call (803) 896-6833.

The South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department reports that it printed 5,200 copies of this newsletter at a cost of \$860, or about \$.17 a copy.



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