

# HORIZONS

SOUTH CAROLINA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION DEPARTMENT

## Bryant receives NAACP citation

SCVRD Commissioner Larry Bryant received a prestigious Presidential Citation Award at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Freedom Fund Celebration on May 18 in Columbia.

Bryant received the Equal Opportunity Advocate Award, presented by state NAACP president Dr. Lonnie Randolph, who was joined by former U.S. President Bill Clinton in the award presentation. President Clinton was the event’s keynote speaker.

The commissioner was honored as “a champion of advocating equal opportunity as he serves as a leader, strategist and educator in South Carolina. As he guides the SCVRD, he consistently provides leadership models that promote empowerment of supervisors, work teams and individual employees.”

Bryant was also honored for his work with advocacy groups, as a clinical professor at the University of South Carolina, and for his positive impact on those in the community who have “felt the lack of equal opportunity vocationally.”

Dr. Randolph praised Bryant for his leadership and community consciousness.

“Each year, we look across the state to find an individual ... who has exemplified our mission, which is

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Photo by Cecil Williams

### **Presidential Citation**

**SCVRD Commissioner Larry Bryant, second from right, receives the NAACP Presidential Citation Award on May 18. He is flanked by former President Bill Clinton, right, state NAACP president Dr. Lonnie Randolph, left, and Quentin James, president of the state NAACP Youth and College Division.**

## Walgreens center holds grand opening

Randy Lewis’s dream is reality.

Lewis, senior vice president of distribution and logistics for Walgreens, was the proudest man in the room June 14 as the drug store chain held grand opening ceremonies for its 670,000-square-foot distribution center in Anderson.

Lewis, whose son has autism, and Walgreens made a commitment four years ago to hire people with disabilities for at least a quarter of the 600-to-800-person workforce at the center.

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**Enabling eligible South Carolinians with Disabilities to prepare for, achieve and maintain competitive employment**

# Blues Doctor brings music to VR Evaluation Center

It could have been Lincoln Center or the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival or Piccolo Spoleto.

Instead it was the cafeteria at the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department's Evaluation Center and the audience couldn't have been more appreciative.

Drink Small, a South Carolina blues legend also known as the Blues Doctor, shared his magic recently with SCVRD clients, jamming on his electric guitar to the delight of all who listened.

"Most of my music is impromptu," the 74-year-old bluesman said, slowly strumming his battered instrument. "I just make up songs."

Earl Smith, a client from James Island, sat in on the session along with Jeremy Meed of Beaufort.

Smith said he's been playing blues all his life until an accident several years ago left him with a brain injury and unable to play.

This night, he borrowed an acoustic guitar and had no trouble keeping up with Small.

Meed was a bit shy about participating.

"Do what you can. We ain't playing for no money," Small

encouraged. "It ain't going to bite you, just excite you."

With his toes tapping, his gray hair tucked under a black beret and his fingers flying across the strings, he treated the audience to renditions of "Charleston Woman Blues," "Thank You Baby," and "New York City Blues" before launching into "Wheelchair Boogie," written especially for SCVRD clients.

The opportunity to sit in with Small left Smith "almost speechless."

"This is the first time I've really been able to play since the accident," he said with a wide grin. "This place does wonders. With this experience, I think I've got a pretty good future."

He and Small have since played several events together.

It was Small's fourth performance at the Evaluation Center, courtesy of Andrina Washington, a rehabilitation aide, and Sharon Sandland, a staff nurse.

Washington said she met Small about 15 years ago when he played for the community at her mother's restaurant in Columbia. Since then, they've become friends and she

frequently cooks "traveling food" for Small and his three-member band.

Sandland said Small, a Bishopville native, broke his back as a child and couldn't work in the cotton fields. He taught himself to play at age 10 on a guitar he built himself.

He also plays a mean boogie-woogie piano.



*Drink Small jams with Earl Smith*

# Disability doesn't keep Evatt from goals

Disability isn't a word Tim Evatt worries much about. If he wants something, he goes after it.

At 41, he's a very happily married attorney and a member of the S.C. State Agency for Vocational Rehabilitation.

He also has quadriplegia after a fall from a magnolia tree in 1986 when he was a sophomore at Wofford.

"He's taken what life's dealt him and made the most of it," said his wife, Rhonda. "He's accomplished more with a spinal cord injury than I have without one."

Evatt attributes his positive attitude to his "rock solid" faith.

"There's a reason things happened like they did," he said.

After the fall and surgery in Spartanburg, Evatt went to the Shepherd Center in Atlanta for rehabilitation. There he met Dave Webb, a peer support person who provided the inspiration Evatt needed.

Webb, who had had quadriplegia since an accident in 1950, wheeled into Evatt's room and asked him what he planned to do with his life.

Evatt responded that he wanted to be a lawyer.

"I'm a lawyer," Webb said.

"From that moment on, I knew it would be a piece of cake," Evatt said.

He said Webb gave him some advice he took to heart: Study hard, prove you're not wasting space, and overcome the stereotype of folks in chairs.

Evatt's done all three.

Back home in Anderson, he sought help at SCVRD's Anderson office and met Danny Mize and Margaret Norryce, who became his support team.

"I called them the Lone Ranger

and Tonto because it was hard to find one without the other," he said.

Mize was Evatt's first counselor and Norryce was his assistant. Through their efforts, Evatt received VR assistance to return to school and a specially equipped van for transportation.

He enrolled in Clemson in the fall of 1986, six months after the accident.

He finished his political science degree in 1990 and went on to graduate from the University of South Carolina Law School in 1993.

When he passed the Bar in 1994 and joined a private practice in Anderson, VR provided a custom-built desk that he still uses today.

In 1999, he went to work for the Anderson County office of the S.C. Department of Social Services, where he handles abuse and neglect cases.

His tenure on the VR governing board began in 2001 after he met former Commissioner Charles LaRosa at an Anderson area office event.

LaRosa called him "out of the blue" and asked him if he wanted to fill an unexpired term.

"I was speechless. It was totally unexpected and very much appreciated," Evatt said.

He brings his perspective as a former client to the board.

"It's the front-line people who set the tone," he said, referring to the people who greet clients as they walk in the door. "And the



*Evatt in his office at the Anderson County Department of Social Services.*

counselors are so anxious to help. You can see the wheels turning as they talk about services."

He said he's also been most impressed with the agency leadership, first LaRosa and now Commissioner Larry Bryant.

"They've done great jobs of being innovative—creative with the budget during tough times and coping with all the TERI retirements," he said.

In addition to his job and board responsibilities, he is a part-time seminary student at Erskine College and Theological Seminary in Due West. He has seven classes to go to get his Master of Divinity degree.

And, he's started the Arise and Walk Ministry with wife Rhonda to provide assistive devices to people with disabilities.

"I want to go and preach at different churches and civic groups. I want to tell my story and what God's done in my life," he said.

Evatt and Rhonda met five years ago through eHarmony. After the 'get-acquainted' e-mails, Evatt asked

See **EVATT**, page 8

# Williamsburg center up and running

The Williamsburg Work Training Center is open for business.

Located in a former Kingstree sewing plant, the 16,000-square-foot center serves an area that has one of the highest unemployment rates in the state. SCVRD has had an office in Kingstree for many years, but clients had limited access to work training center services because of transportation issues. The nearest centers are in Florence, Conway and Sumter.

The Williamsburg center opened Jan. 9. It brings the number of SCVRD work training centers to 24. There are 30 clients on the rolls, working on contracts involving stripping yarn from cardboard spools, packaging cheesecloth and building crates.

"The work varies from week to week, but we've got a consistent group of clients," said Carol Anderson, Florence area supervisor.

Center Manager David Wiggins said contracts are slowly coming in, supplemented by overflow from the centers in Camden, Sumter and Florence.

"If we don't have work, we have classes," he said, including adult education, WorkKeys and safety training.

Audrey Nowlin, the CPE specialist, teaches classes on job seeking and job survival.

Although the area has limited job opportunities for unskilled workers, she said six or seven clients have

found employment and several more are on job tryouts.

She said the classes include a lot of discussion and she's pleased with the client response.

"They feel freer to speak up," she said. "And I take every opportunity for a teaching moment."

Williamsburg is one of South Carolina's largest counties, but its economy is traditionally agricultural and its distance from interstate highways has been a disadvantage.

Wiggins looks forward to stepped-up marketing efforts when a new business development specialist is in place.

Meanwhile, he's making local contacts and Hilton McGill Jr., executive director of the Williamsburg County Development Board, has been helpful in providing leads.

The development board recently has been successful in attracting industries such as Nan Ya, Firestone, Palmetto Synthetics, Milliken, Tupperware, 3-D Metal Works and CPT Medical.

"He gets it," Anderson said of McGill. "He's going to help us make the industries understand what we're doing."

"Your organization locating in Williamsburg County is reaching a sector that we've been unable to help so far," McGill said.



*Rachel Murray packages cheesecloth for Bamboozia, Inc., at the Williamsburg Work Training Center.*



*Wiggins*

## Wiggins juggles job, military commitments

David Wiggins is a "can do" person. Show him a job that needs doing, and he'll take care of it.

His job assignments have been rather disjointed lately, though, because Uncle Sam has precedence over his time.

A 24-year member of the Army National Guard, Wiggins spent a year in Afghanistan from Oct. 2005 until Oct. 2006.

A major with the Second Battalion, 203rd Corps, Wiggins and about 250 other Americans were there to train Afghan Army soldiers.

They lived on what is called an FOB, or forward operating base, in Gardez, between Kabul and Kandahar near Pakistan. The base is heavily fortified with the American quarters segregated from the

See **WIGGINS**, page 5

# Catholic Church ordains LaRosa deacon

Former SCVRD Commissioner P. Charles LaRosa Jr. was ordained as a deacon in the Catholic Church on May 19.

"I've always felt that what we do at VR is a calling of service," he said. "A deacon is a calling of service at a deeper level.

LaRosa retired in January of 2002.

"For a couple years before I retired, I thought about what I wanted to do and where I wanted to be," he said. "I felt a call to get closer to the church. It seemed like a natural transition from 30-plus years in rehab."

He said prospective deacons go through a period of discernment to be sure that's what they want to do.

"It's a commitment for life. It leaves an indelible mark on your soul," LaRosa said.

He praised his wife, Polly, for her support.

"Wives are really involved because so much of our life is involved in the church," he said.

Two Saturdays a month for four years he attended classes that included in-depth studies of the Old and New Testaments, Canon law, pastoral counseling, and preparing effective sermons. A faculty of priests conducts the classes. Ordinations are held every five years.

"It just happened that I retired in January and the class started in September," he said.

While he was studying, Father Andrew Vollkommer, priest at Lady of the Lake Catholic Church in Chapin, put him to work coordinating outreach for the church.

His assignments included:

- Organizing the parish nurse ministry to assist parishioners with home visits, meals and



**P. Charles LaRosa Jr., left, poses with Bishop Robert J. Baker following his ordination.**

blood pressure checks

- Developing tutoring and mentoring services for at-risk children.
- The We Care Food Bank.

He's been assigned to Lady of the Lake, his home church.

"I'm on the altar every Sunday assisting. And I can perform baptisms and officiate at weddings and funerals," he said.

"Call me Deacon Charles."

## Wiggins

*continued from page 4*

Afghan quarters.

"The first eight months I was in a brigade cell, so I went with the general everywhere he went," Wiggins said. "The last four months I was in a medical company, delivering medical supplies to where they were needed."

Stationed in one of the hottest areas of fighting, security was extremely tight.

The rule was "never trust anyone, not even the interpreters, and most of them were kids," he said. If they had to share information with the Afghans, they waited until the very last minute to reduce the chances

of it getting in the wrong hands.

The Taliban is very active in the area.

"The Taliban will kill you if you work for the Americans," he said. "If we catch one, we shoot him. The only good Taliban is a dead Taliban."

He said his best experience was seeing the country and meeting the other soldiers over there. The worst was losing a friend to a roadside bomb.

The natives are very uneducated and just try to stay out of the way.

"They're good people, just trying to survive," Wiggins said.

These days, he's attached to the 351st Aviation Battalion based in Sumter and is about to leave for

another year of active duty.

By July 1, he'll either go to Moncrief Army Hospital at Ft. Jackson in Columbia or Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington, D.C.

It will be a staff position taking care of wounded soldiers returning from the war.

Wherever the assignment, his wife and two boys will stay in Kingstree.

"I'm not crying that it's not Iraq or Afghanistan," he said.

And, he's philosophical about the upheaval.

"I signed on the dotted line to defend my country, and if this is what they want me to do, I'll go," he said.

## Walgreens

*Continued from page 1*

The center opened in January. As of the end of May, there were 275 employees and 42 percent have disabilities, according to Larry Kraemer, human resource manager for the center.

"It's been a work of love," Lewis said. "So far, we've exceeded expectations."

In addition to the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department, the company is working with the Anderson County schools, local government, the S.C. Department of Disabilities and Special Needs and the Veterans' Administration to fill out the workforce.

European firms built disability-friendly machinery and the whole center is geared toward accommodating people with disabilities.

All over the center, "No Them" signs hang from the ceiling.



"I heard one time that when you talk about diversity, you talk about tolerance," Lewis said. "But if you embrace it, it transforms you."

"It has transformed our environment and given power to the word 'inclusiveness' in its fullest sense."

Michael Boyd, a former VR client



**Randy Lewis**

who signed on with Walgreens in December, agrees.

"It really interested me that they would take the time and spend the money to develop an environment for people with disabilities," said Boyd, who works in the "hospital" area fixing any problems that arise, such as mislabeled crates or odd-sized boxes.

"Walgreens is the most people-friendly job I've ever had," he said. "If you have a problem, you can talk to anybody. It's a wonderful work environment and a great place to work. Everybody's treated equally."

Michael Standridge, another former VR client who has a speech and hearing disability, said he'd been looking for a job for about two years when the Walgreens opportunity came along. He's working as a forklift operator.

"I love my job," he said. "The people I work with are friendly and it's a good working atmosphere."

Everyone

hired at the center takes classes in workplace relations, prejudices, stereotypes, politically correct language and types of disabilities.

"At first there was a certain amount of concern and apprehension about stereotypes and social issues," Kraemer said. But "so far, we've had no problems."

Keith Scarborough, distribution center manager, also is enthusiastic about the way things are going.

"We've got a lot of cool technology, but it really comes down to the attitude and the people," he said.

Based on the success in Anderson, Lewis said Walgreens' 15 distribution centers across the country have made a commitment to hire a total of 1,000 people with disabilities by 2010.

He's delighted.

"If you can change enough to hire 1,000, it won't be hard to hire 3,000," he said.

He is realist enough to know that there are going to be hard decisions and failures, but "I think the successes will outweigh the failures."

"The proof will come long after the fanfare is over."



**Michael Boyd, right, observes a co-worker.**

# WorkKeys® program increases job potential

SCVRD clients now have an opportunity to earn credentials they can use to get a job.

The agency instituted the WorkKeys Career Readiness Program statewide in January.

The program is a collaborative effort with the state Department of Education's Adult Education program and the S.C. Department of Commerce.

Through the end of May, 1,868 VR clients had participated.

VR clients undergo a pre-assessment and a two-week skills enhancement with an adult education teacher. When the skills enhancement program is completed, the client takes a battery of tests to qualify for a certificate of completion. For clients who need assistance, skill-building software is available to tailor a curriculum to their individual needs.

The WorkKeys battery of tests measures individual skill levels in such areas as locating information, reading for information, and applied mathematics.

Clients earn a bronze, silver or gold certificate, depending on the



score they achieve on the test. By the first week in June, 161 bronze, 191 silver and 39 gold certificates had been awarded.

An increasing number of employers are using the WorkKeys program to ensure that new employees have the skills necessary to do the job. Certified profilers determine the key components of specific jobs, learn the tasks and determine what skill level is needed.

Advantages to employers include:

- Less turnover
- More productivity
- Less attrition
- Fewer accidents
- Bigger profit margins

"It's an excellent indicator of the skills we need for entry-level employment," said Mildred Hurd, Human Resource manager for Wellman Inc. in Darlington.

"Individual success on the job has markedly improved since we started using WorkKeys in 1997."

VR counselors and CPE specialists are beginning to see the benefits of the program, said Ramona Carr, VR planning coordinator, who has been traveling the state with Anne Iriel, program development coordinator, and Shannon Lindsay, case service specialist, familiarizing staff with the concept.

"When we explained the placement opportunities, light bulbs started going off," Carr said.

She said they realized the benefits of clients being able to present proof to employers that they have necessary job skills.

For example, the Aiken area office is working with S.C. State University's Transportation Career Program to provide training for individuals who have at least a bronze WorkKeys certificate.

Six clients are signed up for pre-employment training, which involves 120 class hours, and one will participate in Heavy Equipment Operation training with 192 hours of training.

The training is free, participants receive a \$600 training stipend, they train for specific job vacancies, and they get job placement assistance when they're finished.

"This is a wonderful opportunity for our clients," said Jan Westmoreland, Aiken area supervisor. "We look forward to a lasting partnership with this program and others that use WorkKeys."

"It's a win-win situation," Carr said, "for clients and employers."

It's also a good marketing tool for business development specialists, she said.

The certificates are good for five years.

## DDS News

S.C. Disability Determination Services will receive several awards at the DDS Management Meeting to be held July 12 in Baltimore.

They are:

- A citation from the Social Security Administration's commissioner for exemplary performance in accuracy, timeliness and productivity in providing exceptional customer service to people with disabilities in South Carolina.
- A commissioner's citation to

the S.C. DDS Administrative Fiscal Team for excellence and conspicuous achievement in job performance, professionalism and customer service.

**Janet Holliday**, a DDS medical services supervisor in Greenville, was named Supervisor of the Year by the National Association of Disability Examiners (NADE) at the organization's recent Southeastern and Great Lakes Bi-Regional Training Conference held in Atlanta.

## Evatt

*continued from page 3*

Rhonda if she could love a man in a wheelchair enough to marry him.

"I have a lot of criteria for a husband, but standing's not one of them," she answered.

Their first date was Nov. 24, 2002, and it was love at first sight for both of them, Evatt said. They were married July 31, 2004.

Rhonda brought two children to the marriage, Sierra, now 16, and Landon, 6. Both have taken Evatt's name and completely adopted him as their Dad.

"When Landon first met Tim, he imitated everything Tim did," Rhonda said. "He'd go through the house turning lights on and off with his fists."

Adjustment issues have been minimal, she said, quoting Sierra:

"You take a man who thought he'd never have kids and two kids who thought they'd never have a dad, and it's a pretty good combination."

Humor reigns in the Evatt household.



**Tim and Rhonda Evatt at the SCVRA conference in February.**

"There's a lot of playing jokes and laughing," said Rhonda, who works in pulmonary rehabilitation for the Greenville Hospital System. "It's insane."

She even has a book due out at the end of the year titled "101 Reasons to Marry a Quadriplegic." Among those reasons are:

- You only have to iron the front of their clothes.
- You always win at pillow fights.
- Their shoes last for 15 years.

"His disability enhances our relationship," she said. "Tim and I are together every morning and every night. He can't go to bed without me."

"It helps us appreciate one another."

## Bryant

*Continued from page 1*

to serve all people in a fair, just and equitable manner," Randolph said.

"This year we honored Larry for the work he has done serving his clients and the state."

"It is a great honor to be chosen to receive a Presidential Citation," Bryant said.

"This reflects our commitment as an agency to promote equal employment opportunities, both for our citizens with disabilities and for our staff. Our state as a whole benefits when everyone is enabled to achieve at their highest level."

In a memo to all SCVRD personnel, agency board Chairman Derle Lowder Sr. wrote, "This award is a reflection of Mr. Bryant's visionary leadership of our agency and his many outstanding accomplishments in his profession and in his community."

Bryant has worked with SCVRD since 1973 and has been commissioner since 2002.

The South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department reports that it printed 5,300 copies of this newsletter at a cost of \$1,160, or about \$.22 a copy.

NEW

# HORIZONS

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