

# HORIZONS

**SOUTH CAROLINA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION DEPARTMENT**

## Hollis takes reins as commissioner

Barbara Hollis is settling comfortably into her new chair as the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department's eighth commissioner.

She's taken on the monumental task of guiding the agency through an ever-increasing budget crisis while overseeing the mission of successful employment for people with disabilities.

She's managing both with aplomb, armed with degrees in psychology and rehabilitation counseling, backed by more than 23 years of experience and supported by a talented staff that knows the importance of a job well done.

"It's a tremendous work environment," she said. "I look forward to coming to work."

A childhood illness led her to seek a career helping people. Although she wasn't interested in a medical career, she is fascinated by the way people deal with the challenges that confront them.

After receiving her bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of South Carolina, she worked at mental health facilities in Greenwood and Greenville. A good friend who worked at VR coaxed her back to Columbia and she joined the agency as a counselor in 1988.

Since then, she's served as administrator of the Evaluation Center; a client services consultant and supervisor; director of planning, program development and comprehensive services; and assistant commissioner.

"She is dedicated to improving the quality of life for South Carolinians with disabilities and we expect



**Barbara Hollis becomes the agency's eighth commissioner**

her to excel as commissioner," said Derle A. Lowder Sr., chairman of the S.C. State Agency of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Hollis grew up in the Pee Dee town of Chesterfield, where her father supervised the mechanic's shop at a trucking company and her mother worked as a bookkeeper and accountant. The fifth of seven children, she is "blessed with a wonderful family."

Even with a brood that large, she remembers that her parents managed to "keep the calm. Of course, there was always lots of extended family around too."

She was raised in a house full of books and loves to read. Her other hobbies include walking and boating with her husband Chris, who owns and operates a landscaping company.

Since she took over the agency reins on January 3, she's been traveling around the state meeting with staff. Despite the budget constrictions, "our employees

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# SCVRD highlighted in state and national magazines

Former Commissioner Larry C. Bryant has been featured in the February issue of "Safety + Health" magazine as one of ten 2009 CEOs Who "Get It."

Neil Lown, SCVRD safety and risk management coordinator, nominated Bryant for the national award with support from agency attorney Jeb Batten.

Lown compiled a list of 11 safety measures implemented since Bryant became commissioner in 2002. The list included safety training, emphasis on increased safety in all VR facilities, and annual safety inspections at all facilities.

Responding to a questionnaire for the magazine article, Bryant noted that many of the disabilities our clients incur are the result of preventable accidents, "so safety is a core value with us. We are committed to providing a safe work environment for our clients and our employees."

He said safe practices result in lower insurance rates, less lost time from accidents and lower medical costs.

"Safety also pays off in high morale," he said. "If we project the philosophy 'we care enough to provide you with a safe environment,' I think it has a direct impact on productivity."

In addition, Bryant said understanding the importance of safety helps with our business relationships.

"Because businesses know we value safety as highly as they do, they are more apt to hire our clients and use our outsourcing services," he said.

Past winners have included the CEOs of Owens-Corning, Weyerhaeuser Co., Pepsico North America, Haynes International Corp., Landstar System Inc., and Deere and Co. To read the interview, go to [www.nsc.org/plus](http://www.nsc.org/plus).

SCVRD's Skilled Workforce Apprenticeship Training (SWAT) program was featured in the January/February 2009 edition of the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce's magazine "South Carolina Business."

The SWAT program provides apprenticeship training designed to produce skilled workers in a stable career field. Participants are screened with WorkKeys to ensure their skills match the needs of the employer and then the participants go through a structured on-the-job training with a mentor.

The article spotlighted former clients who are working as an industrial electrician, a bank teller and a pharmacy technician.

The program has been available to businesses in Richland and Lexington counties for about a year. By June 2009, it will be available statewide.

Go to: <http://tinyurl.com/rpdf48rp> to read the entire story.



# Bryant honored at farewell reception

*Former Commissioner Larry Bryant, center, shows off the Order of the Palmetto, presented by Rep. Nathan Ballentine, R-Richland, on behalf of Gov. Mark Sanford at the Jan. 29 reception. The Order of the Palmetto is the state's highest civilian honor.*

*Rep. Leon Howard, D-Richland, is on the far left. Next to Bryant are his daughter Dr. Nichole Bryant, his wife Dr. Lisa Bryant, and Dr. Lonnie Randolph, president of the S.C. Conference of the NAACP.*



*Commissioner Barbara Hollis presents Bryant with a framed copy of a page from the February issue of Safety + Health magazine. Bryant was featured as one of ten 2009 CEOs Who 'Get It.' [See story, page 2.]*



*Among the gifts Bryant received was a flag that flew over the U.S. Capitol, sent by Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C.*

## Hollis

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remain positive and grateful to work with such a fine agency with a rewarding mission," Hollis said.

"They're people who care," she

said. "They have a strong work ethic and pull together to get the job done."

Maintaining a compassionate, well-trained and effective staff that keeps the focus on client needs is her primary goal.

"The most important thing we

can do is to hire and keep the type of folks who truly want to work here and to help people with disabilities," she said.

"Then we need to be successful in helping our clients get ready for work and placing them in jobs with lasting impact."

# Charleston DDS rallies to claimant's aid

The Charleston Disability Determination Services office rallied all its resources recently to help a distraught woman who was out of money, out of medication and at the end of her rope.

"Louise" was very upset and crying when she called the Charleston DDS office to find out why her disability claim was taking so long.

"I was getting ready to be homeless," she said.

Terry Horton, DDS regional office training coordinator, took the call and immediately recognized that Louise might be suicidal. While he was on the telephone with Louise, he asked Dr. George Keller, the office's senior medical consultant, to locate a psychologist to talk to her.

Horton listened to her concerns for about 15 minutes before turning the call over to the psychologist, Dr. Camilla Tezza.

Meanwhile, Horton contacted

Social Security's Southeast Regional Disability Quality Branch in Atlanta to expedite the claim, which had already been approved by DDS in Charleston.

"She needed financial help to get mental health treatment," Horton said.

"I was so mad," Louise said. "I was on the edge of my seat. I was just wore out and tired."

Louise said she had a history of family violence and was afraid her frustration would lead her to lose control.

Unlike some of her experiences with other people, Dr. Tezza "stayed on the phone with me instead of hanging up," Louise said.

While they were talking, the Disability Quality Branch in Atlanta approved the claim for Medicaid and disability benefits and sent it back to the local Social Security district office for payment.

"They literally cut the check while she was on the phone with

us," Horton said.

By the time Louise had finished talking with Dr. Tezza, she had calmed down considerably. She agreed to call the local mental health center for an appointment the next day and to call 911 if she began to feel worse and thought of harming herself again.

"They did a wonderful job calming me down," Louise said of the DDS staff. "They prevented me from doing something stupid."

## DDS examiners cited

Three Disability Determination Services examiners recently received the Social Security Administration Atlanta Region Center for Disability Customer Service Award.

They are Christina Koot, Charleston; Allen Cooper, Greenville; and Margaret Knott, Columbia.

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