



The OVR Review

"To assist Kentuckians with disabilities to achieve suitable employment and independence"

Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

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Article submitted by Carolyn Eirich

Mentor Recognition and Training

"Julie McConnell Wins Mentor Award"



Left to Right:
Mentor Team—Tom Combs, Jodi Harris,
Malinda Davis, Alan Gullet, Vickey Reilly

We are proud to announce that Governor Beshear proclaimed October as Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Mentor Month. Appropriately, the VR Mentor Program held a training and recognition at Lake Cumberland State Park on October 26-28, 2009.

Mentors, Branch Managers, and Central Office Staff gathered Monday evening (October 26th) for "A Salute to the Mentoring Program". Vickey Reilly, Program Administrator, welcomed everyone and opened the program by recognizing the valued and greatly appreciated role of our mentors in assisting new counselors and contributing to the success of the Agency. Allison Jessee, Assistant Director, presented the *History of The Mentoring Program*, including the beginnings of the program seven years ago, the reason it was developed, and the roots the first mentor team laid down. Allison also shared how this program is now a source of emulation by other agencies. Pam Jarboe, Director, and Lisa Riley, Mentor/Counselor, each outlined benefits of the Mentoring Program from the standpoint of a Branch Manager and a Mentor respectively. Pam and Lisa gave positive examples of the powerful impact Mentor's have on Vocational Rehabilitation. The evening was highlighted with a musical presentation by Julie McConnell and her sister Stephanie as Heather Cole and Jamie Yarber performed a hilarious skit to their musical accompaniment. Many thanks go to Julie, Stephanie, Heather and Jamie. The performances made the evening memorable and uplifting, especially when everyone sang along to *Lean on Me*. Their talents and creativity were much appreciated by all.

The evening was not complete without recognizing those people that have helped make the Mentor Program a success from the very beginning. Allison Jessee, Susie Edwards and Malinda Davis were presented with Certificates of Appreciation. Malinda received a framed thank you poem as she assumed the position of Owensboro's Branch Manager and resigned

her position as Mentor Team Leader. Many thanks go to Allison, Susie and Malinda for all the time, effort and devotion they have put towards the Mentor Program over the years. Beth Smith, Executive Director, and Vickey Reilly then presented the "Mentor of the Year" Award. Ten outstanding nominations were received this year. Julie McConnell was presented with this year's award. Julie has mentored five new counselors over the years and has been tireless in her commitment to helping those she has mentored. Congratulations to Julie! Beth closed the evening with a heartfelt thank you to all the Mentors for their commitment to their fellow Counselors, compassion, selflessness and dedication.

We would like to welcome the newest Mentors; Tammy Brown, Jodi Harris, Lisa Medley and Amy Drake. Tammy, Jodi, Lisa and Amy participated in new mentor training while at Lake Cumberland making them official members of the program. David Beach presented "New Code of Ethics/ Mentorship" and Jeanne Olivas presented "Constructive Criticism" and "Mentoring Multiple Generations". They provided answers to many questions and gave great insight into those topics. The Mentor Panel (Jamie Yarber, Jane Smith, Julie McConnell) also conducted a session on "Mentor Time Management" and gave valuable advice relating to this topic.

The mentor training was a huge success. The evaluations confirm that the topics were both timely and informative. Thanks to David, Jeanne, Jamie, Jane, and Julie for the valuable information and expertise provided during their presentations.

Information about the mentor program's next open enrollment/ application will be available in January, 2010. If you meet the qualifications and want to invest in the future of Rehabilitation Counselors and the advancement of our field, please consider applying to join this team!

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Employee Spotlight Presents Julie McConnell

10 (or More) Questions with Julie McConnell



Julie McConnell

Where did you grow up?

Born in Chicago, Illinois but grew up primarily in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan on Lake Superior. I moved to Kentucky when I started college.

I am the 6th oldest of 15 children. . . ten girls and five boys. I'm used to sharing and working things out with people! My dad is a minister and a doctor, my mom, a church organist and a mother. . . . so

we grew up with lots of church activity. This is probably where I learned best how to play piano, organ, flute & guitar. I love to sing with my sisters.

What kinds of things do you really enjoy away from the office?

I love flowers . . . love to arrange them. I like to read and write. I'm trying to work on a novel about growing up in a family of fifteen. I love to play the piano and the organ and especially the flute. I sing, but I'm not a soloist . . . I like to sing the harmony. We all had to take an instrument growing up so I started playing around the 6th grade, took lessons here and there but play a lot by ear too. I've worked at a variety of churches over the years and currently have a part time job at Nicholasville United Methodist Church as their organist. I love cranking up the organ and playing hymns nice and loudly for people to sing to. But I spend a lot of my spare time with my two youngest sisters (36 & 37 years). Kristi has Down's Syndrome and Sharon has CP and developmental disabilities. I like to bake with them, take them for walks to try to keep their weight down, take them to movies. I think they are a big part of the reason I ended up with VR.

When did you start with VR? Where? Why?

Started in March, 1990. In 2000, I moved to Minnesota and worked for Minnesota VR for 1 ½ years but found I couldn't acclimate to the weather any longer and returned to KY. So I've worked for OVR from 1990 – 2000 and then from 2003-now. Got a psychology degree at Asbury College, then wasn't sure what I wanted to do so I took a year off and worked for a missionary organization in inner city Detroit, leading groups, doing music, helping to feed people @ a mission. Return to Lexington in 1985 and started the program @ UK/Rehabilitation Counseling. When I

started with VR in 1990 I remember being terrified but had wonderful support, training and colleagues early on to guide me. After about three years, I felt like I was finally starting to get the hang of things!

What changes have you seen over the years?

Seems like I'm busier every year that goes by. I guess it's because people's needs get more diverse. I'm also at a One-Stop in Georgetown which can be quite hectic with people who walk in, etc. I miss the statewide trainings we used to have. . . .I know it has to be with budget concerns but I guess those were some of my happiest memories. Everyone getting together with time to get to know each other.

What are your favorite things about your job?

The satisfaction of watching someone go to work, sometimes for the first time, sometimes after a long gap in work history. I love listening to consumers' stories, constantly learning about impairments, different vocations. I love working with people who want to work. I love the variety that comes with our job and I love the challenge. It is the hardest job I have ever done but it is the one I love far and above all others. I like to bounce tough questions off other counselors and get into interesting discussions. It's great that there are most often "happy endings" to our consumers' stories.

What are your least favorite things about your job?

I guess the only thing I really don't care for about my job is the feeling that we can't help some people for whatever reason that may be. Unfortunately there are some barriers we cannot get around and that can be very frustrating.

Do you have anything to say about your coworkers?

I am lucky to be in the Bluegrass District and am fortunate to have Brad Mills for a manager. He truly takes care of his staff. My assistant, Carole Spigle, is amazing and would do anything for me. She 'gets' what VR is about and is very invested in our work together. I work at a One-Stop so my day-to-day co-workers are with the Office of Employment & Training. I feel fortunate every day to work with these people who are tireless. As unemployment lines grow longer, they just work harder and this inspires me to be the best that I can be.

Julie McConnell Continued

How do you feel about being presented with Rehabilitation Counselor Mentor of the Year and who was your mentor?

I was blown away when I was given this tremendous honor and it is truly a highlight in my career. I am very humbled too because I know how hard everyone works and I realize there are many people who deserve this award. My mentor (although not officially as we did not have 'mentors' in 1990) was Geneva Thompson who trained me when I began in Shelby County. Geneva was spunky, determined, practical and incredibly hard-working. Geneva was the kind of counselor I can just aspire to be. She cared beyond bounds for her consumers and was a terrific example to me of what VR counseling is all about.

Would you do anything different if given the opportunity (personally or professionally)?

Personally, sure. . . tons of things. In the past at least I would've treasured moments more growing up, developed more friendships, worked on spiritual things more, practiced the piano more, read more books, studied my Spanish more diligently, but professionally, I wouldn't do anything differently. . . . I love Mondays. I love coming to work. I love what we do.

Do you anything you would like to add?

I'm 48. Life feels like it is rushing by and I often wish I could slow it down. I am reminded every day I am at work that I could easily be in any of my clients' shoes. I am blessed . . . to see, to hear (with the help of hearing aids), to taste, touch and smell, walk and talk, read and write, to laugh and feel happiness and pain and to work . . .to have the best job anyone could ever have. Finally, my sisters, Kristi & Sharon remain a huge influence in my life. We with VR try to help people work and be productive and support themselves and I appreciate that but my sisters, and I call them "the angels" have taught me that it is not always what you do (because there is a lot that they cannot do for themselves), it is who you are and how you love people that matters.

Article submitted by Jane Smith

Consumer Spotlight Presents Rick Spears

When Rick Spears developed a back impairment and could no longer do carpentry work, he came to the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation in early 2009 for guidance and counseling regarding career choices. Mr. Spears had a work history of over 20 years in construction and due to his degenerative disc disease, along with the effects from a back surgery; he thought his work life was finished. Through vocational guidance and counseling, the knowledge, skills, and abilities to own one's own business was discovered. Mr. Spears had the ability and the aptitude to manage many aspects of a business and the personality that led to him being able to take control of his own destiny—Barren County Flea Market.

Rick was provided vocational assessment, along with referrals to appropriate agencies from his counselor, Jane Smith. He quickly developed a viable business plan and was approved to use Office of Vocational Rehabilitation funds to advertise his business. The Barren County Flea Market opened for business on July 4th weekend of 2009. He also utilized dollars from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation to garner the supplies to build booths to house the vendors.

Originally, Barren County Flea Market was going to be an outdoor market, open from March-November yearly. Mr. Spears soon learned that being dependent on the weather to run your business was not a good idea. The outdoor canopies had to be re-set on four different occasions due to storms that blew through Glasgow. At this point, Mr. Spears begin pondering where he could move the business where dealing with the weather would not be a deterrent. Therefore, he utilized family contacts to move to a 70 x 280 building where both vendors and customers could be protected from the environment. Instead of shying away from the effects of the "great recession," Mr. Spears is constantly thinking of new and innovative ideas to add to his business. He recently began a "lettering" booth which is available at the weekend flea market for customers to purchase custom lettering and numbers for use on mailboxes, signs, automobiles, etc. Mr. Spears also does special orders on the lettering and delivers locally for free. Additionally, he has developed a web-based flea market for the citizens of the Glasgow area.

Barren County Flea Market is like most small businesses-it is struggling. Rick is now in the process of trying to update the heating in the building. However since Rick Spears started small and thinks big, his future is bright.

Message from Executive Director, Beth Smith



Once again as I sit to write this update, we are facing another possible cut to our budget. With the state legislators coming to Frankfort in a few weeks, we have been asked to submit a proposal for an additional six percent cut in state funds that could help to offset an ever-widening deficit. As I am sure you all know, that additional cut, should it be adopted, would mean a significant loss of federal dollars as well. Our hope is that we won't have to take that big of a hit; however, almost all of state government is in the same position and it looks like no one will get a pass on this one. I'll keep everyone posted as to any new developments as our representatives work on hashing out the state budget for the next two years.

Another development, this one on the federal level, is the fear by some that the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) will soon be moved under the supervision of the Department of Labor. Recently while attending the national conference of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), I learned there is growing concern that a change of that type might compromise future funding for state VR programs. There's no concern that there will be an immediate impact, but a change in the future direction of vocational rehabilitation would be possible. Again, I'll keep you posted.

I also know that by the time you read this Kentucky OVR will be serving only categories 1&2 in the order of selection. I just want everyone to know that we hope this will be a temporary change and with new revenue we will be able to get individuals with disabilities off the waiting list in the near future. We also want to encourage staff to place everyone who does not meet the requirements of the top two categories and those who agree on the waiting list so we can continue to show our leaders that the demand is high for our services. I would also like to thank all of you for helping make this transition as smooth as possible. I would also like to give kudos to the committee that worked on this and to everyone in central office and the field who contributed to getting the word out to our consumers and community partners.

On a personnel note, Education Secretary Helen Mountjoy stepped down at the end of November to pursue other things in her life. It was my pleasure to work with her over the past two years and I would like to wish her well in her future endeavors. There is no word on a replacement for her at this time. Deputy Secretary Joe Meyer will fill the position on an interim basis. He has been a supporter of OVR and I look forward to working with him.

Finally, by the time you read this, all presents will have been opened, the decorations retired and we will have issued in a new year. I hope that everyone enjoyed the holiday season and that you and your families are safe and well. I also would like to wish everyone a great 2010. I hope it is as fruitful and successful as need be for everyone as we continue to help as many Kentuckians with disabilities as possible find gainful employment.

New OVR Training Website

Article submitted by Susie Edwards

Human Resources Director Susie Edwards recently announced the release of the new OVR Employee Training Website. This website is designed to provide answers to questions regarding training and allow easy access to training resources. One of the features that should prove extremely beneficial is the link to the dedicated training calendar which can be found at the top of each page.

You will also notice that only one online course is currently showing in the OVR online training catalog. The agency has collaborated on several additional online trainings that are in the final stages of completion and these will be made available soon. Most of the online training programs offer CRC credits for the participants. You will see the amount of credits listed in the course catalog feature.

This website is a work in progress and new items will be added as we make enhancements in the upcoming months. The best way to find out what is on the site is to explore and please let me know if I can answer any questions for you.

Susie wanted to send out a special "thanks" to Executive Leadership for their support during this process, to Nanci Soard for assisting with technical issues and to the Web Improvement Team for reviewing and providing input to improve the site. <http://www.ovrtraining.ky.gov>

NEWS BITS

District Ticket to Work Specialist training

The District Ticket to Work Specialists met on December 2 & 3 to review the agency's progress since revised Ticket to Work regulations went into effect July 2008. Prior to the regular meeting, an orientation session was held for new specialists. In addition to OVR staff, a number of other Ticket partners were represented, including Office for the Blind, Social Security, Employment Networks, Work Incentives Planning & Assistance (WIPA), and Protection & Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS). The 2nd day of the meeting was devoted to "optimizing" Ticket to Work and included a session on Partnership Plus and a PowerPoint presentation designed to introduce employers to Ticket to Work and partnering with OVR.

OVR recognized by sister agency



Beth Smith accepts the award from Chris Smith on behalf of OVR.

The Kentucky Office for the Blind recently awarded OVR with its Partnership of the Year Award. This award recognizes a professional individual or organization (state, federal or private) whose involvement and contributions have assisted OFB in accomplishing its

mission. This may include an employer, an individual or an organization employing a consumer who is visually impaired or a public or private company that has provided a vending opportunity for Kentucky Business Enterprises.

The following is the nomination that was read at the ceremony.

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), our sister agency, is a vital partner to the agency. OVR and OFB provide very similar services through very similar processes. This year has been one of the most challenging for the OFB. The agency faced challenges related to under staffing, state and federal financial and program related reporting. All the issues the agency faced impaired our ability to function efficiently. During the past year as OFB experienced some difficult times. OVR was instrumental in assisting

us with processes that allowed us to complete some of our day-to-day duties. Their support saved the agency money, staff time and frustration. It is good to be able to collaborate with colleagues about important issues regarding finance, technology and personnel. That type of collaboration is an excellent example of a true partnership.

Supported Employment Grant means more options for consumers

Kentucky has become the 13th state to be selected as an implementation site for the Johnson & Johnson-Dartmouth Community Mental Health Program for adults with serious mental illness. This national program systematically works with states to implement supported employment following evidence-based guidelines, initially in a small number of sites, and expanding statewide over time. Through the support of the Johnson & Johnson Corporate Contribution, the Dartmouth Psychiatric Research Center oversees the Program and provides ongoing technical assistance and consultation to the selected states.

Carol Estes, Supported Employment Services Branch Manager with OVR, and Louis Kurtz, Best Practices Coordinator with the Kentucky Division of Behavioral Health will be Co-Managers of the project in Kentucky. A statewide Supported Employment Trainer will be hired through a contract with the Human Development Institute at UK to coordinate pilot site development and to provide training and on-site assistance to each newly developed supported employment program. For more information on this new project, you may contact Carol or Lou, or visit the website at <http://dms.dartmouth.edu/dsec/jj/jidcmhp>.

Creative Diversity

Five artists involved in Creative Diversity, an Artists' Cooperative which began a partnership with OVR in 2006, showcased their works at the Louisville Free Public Library's Bernheim Gallery during October and November. The Exhibit opened with a Night of Celebration on October 15 hosted by the artists and their mentors from Creative Diversity. Each artist displayed selected pieces and mingled with Library patrons and special guests who visited the Bernheim Gallery during the Opening Night. Public reviews of the art show were very positive.

Governor Appoints Six New Council Members

At the end of October, the Council received nine appointments from the Governor's Office. Three of the new members represent groups mandated by federal law to be represented on the Council. Those three members are:

- Rhonda Logsdon, appointed to represent the Kentucky Special Parent Involvement Network (Ky-SPIN), the parent training and information center in the state;
- Vanessa Denham, appointed to represent the Client Assistance Project (CAP); and
- Thomas West, appointed to represent the Workforce Investment Board (WIB).

There were also five public members appointed to the Council. They are:

- Christine Czechorski from Verona to represent business, industry and labor;
- Irene Dervin from Winchester to represent individuals with disabilities;
- Connie Dotson from Lexington to represent disability advocacy groups for the deaf;
- John Mathias from Henderson to represent business, industry and labor; and
- Karen Rossi from Lexington to represent consumers of vocational rehabilitation services.

All of the new members attended their first Council meeting in Lexington on December 14.



The OVR Review is a publication of the Kentucky Office for Vocational Rehabilitation.

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(Jason Jones - Content Editor, Nanci Soard - Layout Editor)

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Meet John Mathias Council Member



John Mathias

John Mathias was one of the recent appointments to the Council by the Governor in October. He has been employed by the Henderson County Chamber of Commerce since 2005. He graduated from Ivy Tech State College in 2001 with an associate degree in three-dimensional animation and the University of Southern Indiana in 2005 with a bachelor's degree in graphic design. He designs and coordinates the printing of all chamber publications and oversees the chamber's Web site. In addition, John helps promote chamber events and coordinates the chamber's Inside Henderson, Mentoring and Internship programs. He is involved with numerous community organizations and is a member of the boards of directors at both Riverview School for Special Needs Children and Henderson Habitat for Humanity. He is active in the Henderson Masonic Lodge and the Henderson Shriners Organization. He lives in Henderson with his wife, Donna, who works for Kentucky Farm Bureau. Of his involvement with the Council, John says "I look forward to serving on the council. I know first hand what it is like to have a disability which only allows me to have greater knowledge to be able to help others with disabilities eager to join the workforce."

Save the Date Upcoming Council Meeting

Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation (SCVR) Meeting

Monday, March 8, 2009
9:00-3:30

Marriott Griffin Gate Resort and Spa
1800 Newtown Pike
Lexington, KY 40511