



Media Release

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South Arkansas man who's blind earns achievement award

Robert D. Brown, formerly of Malvern, has been named the area's outstanding Consumer of the Year by the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB).

He was selected for the achievement award from the area including Saline, Garland, Hot Spring, Grant, Clark, and part of Pulaski Counties. DSB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Henry Washington nominated him for the award because of his determination to overcome adversity and succeed at work.

Brown said he was born without an optic nerve (Optic Nerve Hypoplasia) and, as a result, has no light perception in his eyes. He had attempted multiple job pursuits without success in his local area, so he reached out to potential employers in surrounding states. "Brown was willing to relocate to to become gainfully employed," said the counselor.

Brown contacted Alphapointe, because he recalled touring it when he was sent to a National Industries for the Blind convention after receiving an employee of the year award from East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind in 1996. The call landed him a job interview.

After training for six months at Alphapointe, Brown was hired as a switchboard operator. He then became a call center representative and later was promoted to team leader. "Mr. Brown was given a job promotion due to his excellent work. His responsibilities have increased accordingly," said Washington.

The award presentation was made at his workplace on January 23. His employer, Alphapointe, was recognized by DSB as an outstanding business partner for its commitment to promoting the employment of persons with vision impairment.

“Alphapointe is a great company to work for,” Brown said. “They take care of their employees and have a retirement plan and health insurance. They make you feel like you’re part of a team.”

Brown, a native of Texarkana, attended high school at Arkansas School for the Blind and participated in wrestling and track. He graduated from the University of Texas at Tyler with a Bachelor’s degree in computer science. Brown took the college prep course and later the IRS taxpayer representative training at World Services for the Blind in 1991. He was placed in California and worked for the IRS for two years, but the cost of living there was too high, so he moved back to Arkansas.

In his spare time he enjoys being a HAM radio operator and “contacting people from around the world, assisting in disasters, and listening to far-off radio stations and weather news.” He is a member of Blind Amateur Radio, a HAM operator group in Kansas City, and is a member of the National Federation of the Blind. Despite his relocation, Brown said, “I’ll always be a big Razorback fan.”

His wife Deana relocated to Kansas City with him. He expressed appreciation for DSB services, which provided the couple with short-term room and board until they could find more permanent living arrangements. His DSB counselor also provided vocational rehabilitation counseling and guidance, job search assistance, job placement assistance, and transportation.

This is the ninth year that DSB has given Consumer of the Year awards to recognize individuals who have managed their rehabilitation plans, gained marketable skills, secured good jobs, and become role models for others.

DSB provides vocational rehabilitation services to adults who are blind or severely visually impaired and whose goal is successful employment. The division also serves youth and older blind individuals. For information about DSB’s programs and services, visit the DSB website at <http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dsb/Pages/default.aspx> or call 501-682-5463 or 1-800-960-9270.