October 2013

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“Forever Changed”

The 2013 Florida Youth Leadership Forum

by Ray Ford, Jr.

For 14 years, The Able Trust has hosted the Florida Youth Leadership Forum, which invites high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors from across the state to participate in four days of leadership and social training at no cost.

The 2013 Florida Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) welcomed first-time delegates from across the state as they participated in four days of leadership and social training highlighted by a “Day at the Capitol”, Annual Career Fair, and Mentors’ Luncheon.

Living up to its tagline of Empowerment, Education, and Employment, disability history and sensitivity seminars made delegates aware of their rights as citizens and their responsibility to ensure that those rights are carried over into future generations, while learning to treat others (including themselves) with respect. Career exploration and college opportunities were also discussed, as resource events reinforced the need for students to strive for the highest levels of education and employment possible.

But those are only two of the three “Es”. The first (and arguably most important) “E”, empowerment, galvanizes the other two. Without a deeply-rooted sense of self-worth and pride, the other two don’t matter.

“YLF has taught me not to be fearful of my future. To embrace it, and to be excited about it,” YLF 2013 delegate Brianna Schubert said.

Nearly 40 delegates -- many of whom leaving home for the very first time -- accepted the challenge of getting out of their comfort zones in order to experience something new, something that could be life-changing.

(continued on page 4)
To our friends and supporters:

My message to you for this edition of the Florida Grantor is the copy below of an Op-Ed that I wrote and submitted to the Orlando Sentinel. The editorial was published in the August 25 Sunday paper of the Sentinel, and received some wonderful responses. It contains the recommendations of the Governor’s Commission on Jobs for Floridians with Disabilities, and other comments that I am sure many of you share. As I state at the end of the article, we have miles to go, be assured The Able Trust is committed to the mission, long term.

Enjoy autumn – a beautiful time in Florida.

Dr. Susanne F. Homant, MBA
President & CEO

Governor’s Commission on Jobs for Floridians with Disabilities Releases its Recommendations

As the Florida economy begins to rebound, a growing chorus of business and economic development leaders are raising concerns about our state’s ability to meet workforce needs. Policy leaders are responding with a stronger focus on hands-on and career-related education programs with the laudable goal of ensuring Florida students can walk off the graduation stage with diplomas and degrees that are passports to real jobs in the real economy. But for an important segment of our workforce, our educational efforts must also focus on the employers.

In 2011, members of the Governor’s Commission on Jobs for Floridians and Disabilities were tasked with developing feasible and practical recommendations to increase the number of people with disabilities (PWD) who are employed. Since that time, they have traveled across the state to listen to businesses and individuals and discovered that, despite the tremendous progress made by most other segments of the population working to overcome discrimination or bias, misconceptions and stereotypes remain among the greatest barriers to employment for Floridians with disabilities. We listened with hearts in our throats as business owners expressed their fears about hiring workers with disabilities and potential increased costs for health and liability insurance – concerns based more on misunderstanding than reality.

The sad reality is, all too many employers still buy into the outdated notion that hiring a person with a disability is an act of charity. This persistent misperception is a big part of the reason that only approximately 29% of people with disabilities (PWD) who are employed. Since that time, they have traveled across the state to listen to businesses and individuals and discovered that, despite the tremendous progress made by most other segments of the population working to overcome discrimination or bias, misconceptions and stereotypes remain among the greatest barriers to employment for Floridians with disabilities. We listened with hearts in our throats as business owners expressed their fears about hiring workers with disabilities and potential increased costs for health and liability insurance – concerns based more on misunderstanding than reality.

The Commission’s second report, released this month, provides five strong recommendations for activities and policy changes that the Commission believes will increase opportunities for successful employment for people with disabilities:

As the economic recovery accelerates, smart business will seek the talent of workers with disabilities sooner rather than later – before they are lost to Florida as they go elsewhere.
To foster continuous awareness and support on the issue of successful employment for Floridians with disabilities, The Able Trust has moved away from the single day focus of shadowing and site visits that was once associated with Disability Mentoring Day, replacing it with a more comprehensive Disability Employment Awareness Month (DEAM) “season”, eventually leading to a year-round career experience opportunity for Floridians with disabilities.

Visit our website at http://www.abletrust.org/ndmd/ to learn more about DEAM, find out about activities in your area, or get information on how to become an event sponsor.
“The more I sit here and think about my life and my future, I realize just how lucky I am,” she said. “Sometimes I struggle, I’m not going to lie. Sometimes I wonder why I was dealt these cards. Sometimes I get so mad that I can’t do what feels like the simplest things, like running. I wish I fit into places better, that I wouldn’t be nervous that people would judge me. But, then I have to remember the experience I just had; the one where nobody treats you like you’re different. The one where you can talk to somebody for five minutes and feel like you’ve known them forever. The one where you make bonds that will last forever.”

“I had such a great time at the Youth Leadership Forum at our state capital these past few days,” delegate Drew Dees added. “I have had a lot of fun experiences and made a bunch of new friends. The Forum has taught me how to embrace my disability and inspire others to do the same. If we all come together, we can make a BIG difference, and I hope to take what I learned from this experience and SHOW THE WORLD THAT WE CAN!”

A special group of 21 students received special invitations to come back as staff members after attending YLF as delegates themselves in 2012. They return home proud of the impact they’ve made in the lives of young people who are traveling the same road they are.

“To me, being a Support Staff member is about standing up for what’s right,” Lacesha Owens said. “It’s about being a positive role model and making yourself a better person, and to always be a leader not a follower.”

“After YLF 2012, I thought long and hard about what I wanted to do with all the great experiences I gained,” Tyler Von Harten said. “I decided that I wanted to pay it forward. If I could change someone’s life and make them feel as inspired as I was at YLF last year, my goal in life would be complete. It was incredible to witness the process of watching delegates break the ice little by little and blossom into the great leaders that each one of them are. It was a pleasure seeing the new generation of leaders.”

“I cannot think of anything to say but ‘WOW’,” Dawn Tansill said about her son. “My sweet, sweet, sweet boy came home more confident; more sure of himself and with a completely different perspective of making friends that have physical disabilities as well as the learning disabilities he struggles with. Matthew’s literal words when he got in the car was, ‘Mom, I am forever changed.’”

Nearly 20 mentors from across the state gave career advice to delegates at the 2013 Career Fair.
Grantee Spotlight: Brooks Clubhouse Vocational Integration Program
by Guenevere Crum

After receiving therapy and treatment at Brooks Hospital for a brain injury he sustained, Jeff had a dream of becoming a physical therapist. He felt that during his own recovery and treatment he received such kindness and understanding by the staff that he wanted to be part of the same team, delivering that same care to others. Jeff had attended the University of North Florida and was eager to begin his new journey; however the learning process now presented additional challenges. It was then that Jeff was connected with Vocational Rehabilitation, who in turn referred him to the grant-funded program at Brooks Clubhouse.

The Brooks Clubhouse serves individuals 16 years old and older who live with the effects of a brain injury (traumatic and non-traumatic) or stroke in Northeast Florida. Participants have made a commitment to enhance their vocational skills by becoming better integrated into community life. The Clubhouse receives funding from several organizations, including The Able Trust. Funds from The Able Trust provide support for staffing needs, which include a Job Developer and Job Coach who work directly with individuals in achieving their vocational goals. This was just the kind of assistance put in place to assist Jeff once he entered the Clubhouse program and expressed his goal of becoming a therapist. Thanks to steady training and observation of his work behaviors in the business/office work unit at the Clubhouse, a computer-based evaluation, and his participation in vocational classes he was soon ready for an internship. Jeff was the first member to participate in the new internship program at the Clubhouse, and during his internship the vocational team worked with him on problem-solving, organization, communication, daily job-related documentation, and work ethic.

His internship position as a patient transporter not only gave Jeff marketable skills, but also put him in the same work environment as his ultimate long-term goal of becoming a physical therapist. Jeff’s performance was outstanding during his internship, and he worked hard at improving himself. Although feedback was sometimes hard to hear for Jeff, he really wanted to succeed and gave it his full effort. The vocational team continued to work with him at the Clubhouse and on the job site, suggesting techniques and accommodations that would best support him in his position. Gradually the hard work paid off, and Jeff developed a positive reputation.

Once the internship was completed, the vocational staff worked with Jeff to search for employment in the metro area that matched his newly-developed skill set. The vocational staff was approached by a Brooks hiring manager in the Spinal Cord Unit Injury team regarding an open PRV position for a patient transporter. Although a hiring manager in the interview process had some initial reservations, the feedback from co-workers, patients, and the unit manager were nothing but positive. Vocational staff assisted Jeff in applying for the paid position and he was offered the job. This position covered not only the Spinal Cord Injury Unit, but all other floors including radiology, and transfers to Memorial Hospital. Due to the specialized procedures specific to each floor, Jeff was given two days of training per area. The grant-funded job coach accompanied him during his initial orientation and training to help with the adjustment. He was provided a pocket notebook, and each floor/area was assigned a different color in the notebook. This reference guide assisted Jeff in recalling the different procedures as he changed floors. Jeff proved to be a true success, and the feedback on his job performance continues to be positive.

According to data provided by the Brooks Health Foundation, there are approximately 3,000 individuals living in the metro-Jacksonville area hospitalized due to a traumatic or non-traumatic brain injury or stroke each year. Twenty percent of that group will need ongoing support from specialists and vocational training in order to successfully return to work. The Brooks Clubhouse works to span the gap between the medical rehabilitation process, and successful community living and vocational experiences that are associated with being an independent adult. The Able Trust Grant Program seeks to provide support to community organizations providing such employment assistance to individuals with disabilities, and is proud to be a grant partner with Brooks Clubhouse to help support Jeff and other participants in achieving their employment goals.
Florida High School High Tech (HSHT) achieves its goals by setting high expectations; encouraging youth to consider technology-related careers; and promoting the involvement of family members and other caring adults. HSHT recognizes that education in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) is for all youth. STEM career opportunities abound in Florida, whether a student has their sights set on going to college, obtaining a 2-year degree, or completing a shorter certification program.

Core features of the HSHT program – job-shadowing, industry site visits, mentoring, and internships – are designed to provide hands-on experiences that excite and attract students to STEM careers. HSHT partners with business and industry through local Business Advisory Councils to ensure the program standards align with business needs. HSHT also fosters business champions that understand the importance of diversity in the workplace, and the benefits of including students with disabilities in STEM education.

The Florida HSHT Program is expanding this year from 35 to 39 sites to include Collier, Lake, and Polk counties, and a second site in Miami-Dade County.

Contact The Able Trust for more information or to find out how to become involved with HSHT in your local area.

**HSHT Promotes Real World Work Experiences**

“This has turned out to be a win-win-win for the electric department, the intern, and a valuable community program.”

–Robert Wigen, City of Tallahassee, Utilities Manager

During the summer of 2013, 256 students participated in summer internships, 85% of which were paid through a stipend by the employer, the HSHT program site, the local Workforce Development Board, or another community grant provider.

**EMPOWERMENT**

HSHT Internship Partners Include: Santa Fe College IT Dept., Florida Aquarium, The Armed Forces Museum, CVS, Fairpoint Communications, Leary Technical Center, University of Florida Dairy Unit, Boys and Girls Club, Chambers of Commerce, local school districts, city governments and numerous local businesses.

During the 2012-2013 school year, the Florida HSHT Program served 1,101 students with disabilities in 36 Florida counties. Services were provided in 97 high schools and alternative education settings including Department of Juvenile Justice facilities and a foster care pilot site. The Florida HSHT Program experienced a low 1% high school drop-out rate for all seniors participating in the program.

**EDUCATION**

74% of Florida HSHT graduates entered postsecondary education, continuing education, or employment upon graduation. In addition, 125 Florida HSHT students, representing all grades, secured employment through program services.
Partners Making A Difference - Rotary Club of Tallahassee

by Kathryn McManus

Service Above Self – the underlying motto of Rotary clubs everywhere – is more than just words to the members of the Tallahassee Rotary Club. They take on dozens of projects yearly, from partnering with other groups on such causes as Habitat for Humanity, Toys for Tots, Second Harvest, and the Salvation Army, to efforts of their own such as building three clean water projects in Haiti. Their collective dedication was honored last spring when they were named the 2013 District Rotary Club of the Year.

Tallahassee Rotary has also been a faithful sponsor for several years of The Able Trust’s Florida Youth Leadership Forum (YLF). In addition to the Club’s generous financial support that helps make the program possible, members donate many hours welcoming the youth attendees to Tallahassee, and supporting activities during the Forum week. Greeters help arriving delegates find their way through the airport, and escort them to departing flights on their way home. A favorite event is the annual Etiquette Dinner, set up and served by Rotarians.

“Rotary service is local, global, and far-reaching,” says Tallahassee Rotary Club President John Medina, Sr. “The Rotary Club of Tallahassee takes great pride in our outreach to youth services. As such, our partnership with The Able Trust’s Florida Youth Leadership Forum is a perfect fit. Our members look forward to engaging the YLF attendees and providing encouragement and support. Frankly, we are inspired by these young men and women. In July 2013, our club had the honor of hosting Renzo Burga, a YLF alumni and mentor. Renzo’s speech to our club personalized the impact that YLF is having in the life of these very special young folks. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to partner with such an amazing organization and program.”

Congratulations to the members of Tallahassee Rotary Club for the powerful impact you have on our families, communities, state, and even the world. And thank you for your continued support of the YLF. You are making a difference to some very special young leaders of the future, and providing an outstanding model of service.

Thanks to the financial support of our partners, The Able Trust has provided employment support to thousands of Floridians with disabilities, while awarding more than $31 million to grantees across the state, enabling thousands of Floridians with disabilities to enter the workforce each year.
Holiday Card Contest

Assist The Able Trust in celebrating the December holidays and New Year by creating a greeting card front piece

Open Call to Florida Artists!

1st Prize, $150
2nd Prize, $100
3rd Prize $100

Contest Opens: Monday September 30, 2013

Entry Deadline: Friday November 1, 2013 at 5 PM.

Format: Original Artwork on paper no larger than 8 ½ X 11 OR on a JPEG file between 750KB-1MB on disk. Artwork should be sent along with an “About The Artist” statement of 50 words or less. The Statement should provide a personal statement about the artist, the submitted piece of art, the holiday season, and disabilities. Both submitted Artwork and Statement should be labeled with the Contact name, complete address, phone number and email of Artist.

Attention: Original Artwork will be returned only if accompanied by a self addressed and stamped envelope. Not responsible for lost or damaged pieces. One Artwork Submission per Artist. Artists must currently maintain a Florida address. Artists with disabilities encouraged to apply. Artwork submitted in formats other than outlined above will not be considered.

Selected Artwork: Images of the top 3 Selected pieces will be retained for any use by The Able Trust for up to 2 years from the date of selection. Winners will be notified after November 15, 2013 of their selection. Entries are encouraged to be festive and reflective of Florida’s diverse culture.

Send To: The Able Trust; Holiday Card Contest; 3320 Thomasville Rd, Suite 200; Tallahassee, FL 32308 and arrive no later than 5 PM November 1, 2013.
Make A Difference With Your Donation to The Able Trust!

There are many ways you can support The Able Trust’s programs to make successful employment available to Floridians with disabilities, and a gift of any amount will make a difference. For general contributions in support of our youth, mentoring and grant programs, you may click the “Make a Donation” button on our website, www.AbleTrust.org, or mail your gift with the form below to:

**The Able Trust, 3320 Thomasville Road, Suite 200, Tallahassee, Florida, 32308-7906**

Tax Deductible Donation Amount ($): ________________________________

Cash, Check or Credit Card Donations are Accepted. Please make checks payable to The Able Trust.

Is this donation (please check one):

- [ ] To honor someone
- [ ] In memory of someone
- [ ] For a special occasion

Name: _____________________________

Address: ____________________________

City, State, Zip: _____________________________

Credit Card Type: ___________________ Credit Card Number: ________________

Credit Card Expiration Date: ___________ Credit Card CSV: ________________

E-mail: ____________________________

Please add me to The Able Trust’s [ ] email list   [ ] mailing list (please check one or both).

Do you have questions about Able Trust giving opportunities, corporate sponsorships, or endowment and planned giving? Please feel free to contact us at info@abletrust.org or 850-224-4493.

The Able Trust’s mission is to be a key leader in providing Floridians with disabilities opportunities for successful employment. Since its establishment, The Able Trust has awarded more than $30 million in grants to nonprofit agencies throughout Florida for employment-related purposes, enabling thousands of Florida citizens of all ages with disabilities to enter the workforce. The Able Trust youth programs provide career development and transition for thousands of high school students with disabilities since its beginnings, helping to reduce the dropout rate and prepare young adults for life beyond high school.

For more information about The Able Trust visit www.abletrust.org.
**Attention State Workers!!!**

**The Able Trust Joins The Florida State Employees’ Charitable Campaign**

Each year, state employees play a key role in conducting the Florida State Employees’ Charitable Campaign (FSECC), generously contributing millions of dollars to their favorite charities. The FSECC provides an organized and effective method by which state employees can donate to the charities of their choice, either through payroll deduction or a one-time gift. Employees are encouraged to use payroll deduction, breaking an otherwise large monetary pay-out into manageable installments throughout the year.

In the 32 years of the FSECC, a total of $90.7 million has been contributed by generous state employees, benefitting more than 1,300 FSECC-approved charitable organizations who provide services and programs that meet basic human, or environmental needs throughout Florida and around the world.

When making your contribution, search for The Florida Endowment Foundation for Vocational Rehabilitation (aka The Able Trust).

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**Smithsonian Traveling Exhibit Highlights Youth Programs of The Able Trust**

*by Ray Ford, Jr.*

In late August, The Able Trust took advantage of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to showcase its youth programs.

On August 27, The Florida High School High Tech (HSHT) Program and Florida Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) had their respective displays unveiled at The Historic Capitol in Tallahassee as part of an initiative created by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service.

This year-long exhibit is free and open to the public in Tallahassee’s Historic Capitol. It is located on the first floor along with several other civic organizations from across the state.

This exhibit, “Choosing to Participate: The Power of Civic Engagement” seeks to explore the impact of various civic organizations across the state of Florida, examining the choice between being a participating upstander or passive bystander in our communities. It also spotlights initiatives that encourage Florida students to create positive social change.

Visit The Historic Capitol to see this year-long exhibit. Admission is free. For information on hours of operation, visit http://www.flhistoriccapitol.gov/.

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Partners Making A Difference - TD Bank

by Kathryn McManus

At TD Bank, America’s Most Convenient Bank®, diversity is more than an HR buzzword. TD Bank makes diversity and an inclusive environment a strategic business priority for its approximately 27,000 employees in 1,300 locations from Florida to Maine. The mission is to make TD Bank a place where employees are free to be themselves at work each day, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, abilities or disabilities.

To accomplish this, TD Bank established a bank-wide Diversity Leadership Team and five subcommittees focused on expanding opportunities for women in leadership, expanding opportunities for minorities in leadership, building an agenda for people with disabilities, LGBT, and serving diverse communities. But the bank isn’t just focused internally. Diversity is also about being the bank of choice for customers who can see themselves reflected in its employees.

Recently, TD Bank was named among the 2013 DiversityInc Top 50 Companies for Diversity. The DiversityInc Top 50 includes companies from a wide range of industries whose leadership, procurement practices, communications, and training best reflect the reality of the rapidly changing face of America. Outside of its corporate culture, TD Bank strives to represent diversity in its communities through partnerships with organizations and programs like The Able Trust that reflect this philosophy of supporting all people. TD Bank has provided support for the 2013 Florida Youth Leadership Forum through a $5,000 grant from the TD Charitable Foundation, and is one of nine companies supporting the Able Trust’s “Look at My Ability” campaign. The bank is also working to provide financial literacy education to Able Trust program participants, as well as mentoring opportunities.

“The TD Bank reflects the communities it serves, meaning our employees and customers come from all backgrounds, abilities, sexual orientations, and religions,” TD Bank Regional President Ernie Diaz said. “We are proud to support The Able Trust in its important work to provide opportunities for people of different abilities.”

The Able Trust is pleased to welcome TD Bank to a growing list of corporate supporters, and congratulates them on putting into action their commitment to people with disabilities.
Memorial Gifts

There are many ways for you to make a gift in remembrance of someone special that will have meaningful significance for years to come. Here are a few options to consider:

Make a Deductible Gift and Receive Life Income

You may wish to make a memorial gift while providing current life income for yourself. If your memorial gift is made to fund a charitable remainder trust, you can receive income monthly, quarterly or annually. You receive a charitable deduction for your gift this year and avoid paying capital gains tax on the sale of your appreciated assets. The remainder passes to us as a gift in memory of your loved one. Please contact us for more information on charitable trust plans.

A Memorial Gift of Cash or Property

A gift of cash is one of the simplest ways to remember your loved one or friend. You receive a tax deduction for the value of your gift to The Able Trust. Please designate the person you wish to remember and the best way that we can honor them. If you are making a memorial gift of non-cash property, your deduction may depend on the type of property proposed for gifting. Please call us to discuss the treatment of your gift and the best way to transfer your property to us.

Contributions are deductible according to applicable IRS guidelines. The Able Trust is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization and in compliance with the Florida Solicitation of Contributions Act.