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October is Florida Disability Employment Awareness Month!

by Ray Ford, Jr.

Joseph Murray is an example of the impact employment initiatives like DEAM can have, not only on the lives of participants, but on the businesses that hire them, and the economy as well.

On October 13, The Able Trust launched the 2016 Florida Disability Employment Awareness Month (DEAM) with a kick-off event at the Grand Hyatt Tampa Bay, where Florida business leaders came to learn about the importance of hiring Floridians with disabilities.

Florida DEAM is part of a national event highlighting various industries and potential career paths, and connecting participating businesses to students and job seekers with disabilities. Through hands-on career exploration, on-site job shadowing, and other work experiences, participants gain increased knowledge about the workforce. Florida’s DEAM program has been organized by The Able Trust for the past 10 years, working with statewide partners, who provide support to local community liaisons as they coordinate the matchmaking experience between businesses and participants. One of the direct beneficiaries of DEAM initiatives is Joseph Murray who, despite his disability, has been employed in hospitality services at the Boca Resort Beach Hotel for six years. Joseph credits The Able Trust for giving him a greater knowledge of the business world, and providing a support system as he honed his skills.

“Being a recipient of Able Trust initiatives has given me self-worth, confidence, and the inner strength to explore the workforce and succeed,” he said.

Joseph is a perfect example of what can happen when citizens with disabilities are given a chance. Florida business leader Richard Gonzmart, President and CEO of the Gonzmart Family of Restaurants, challenged fellow leaders to do just that.

“The ability to make an impact on the lives of others through our businesses,” he said.

(continued on page 4)
A Message from the President

Disability Employment Awareness Month becomes a season . . .

On the morning of October 13, The Able Trust gathered friends and businesses together at the Grand Hyatt Tampa Bay to officially launch the statewide Disability Employment Awareness Month – or DEAM – activities. Over 100 people from the central Florida area were inspired by noted speakers who support a diverse and inclusive workforce that includes people with disabilities.

The concept of DEAM began nationally several years ago as one day per year when businesses provided job shadowing experiences. That grew to a week in October, then to a month, then to what we now call a season. We celebrate and launch the statewide activity in October each year, but the work experiences now span several months, as businesses become more involved in this talent supply. And the work experiences, now expanded beyond job shadowing to include mentoring, internships, even part time work, occur throughout the state with the help of many local DEAM liaisons, who work with local businesses interested in the talent within the workforce made up of people with disabilities.

Richard Gonzmart, President & CEO of the Columbia Restaurant Group encouraged the audience to work with young people and children to help them find their talent. He proudly reported that his restaurants employ many people with disabilities, many with long tenure.

Neil Romano, formerly top staff at the federal Office of Disability Employment Policy and an Able Trust Ambassador, spoke of the federal and state policies that discourage people with disabilities from working full time. He emphasized the importance of a job in everyone’s life, stating that everything we do flows from our job. He thanked the businesses in the audience for their leading-edge employment of people with disabilities.

State legislators Senator Latvala and Representative Peters reported on their commitment to help create and change policy at the state level, to open opportunities for the employment of people with disabilities and to remove policy barriers. They were joined by Able Trust youth program graduate Sarah Goldman, who serves as Rep Peters district aide, and serves as an expert advisor to them on issues related to people with disabilities.

Also keynoting was Joseph Murray, another graduate of Able Trust programs, a delightful young man with autism who has been employed full time at the Boca Beach Resort for over 6 years. He spoke from the heart about what a job has meant in his life, stating, “Having a full time job and steady income has afforded me the opportunity to be independent, I live in a nice condo, I cook my dinners, food shop, use coupons, do my laundry. I have a checking and savings account, manage my money, pay my bills, and discover my strengths day to day.” Joseph is the “face” of DEAM this year, featured on DEAM materials that are distributed throughout the state.

The event closed with remarks from Marcy Benton, Able Trust Board member and Publix Executive, who talked about Publix long-time commitment to hiring the best person for the job, and including people with disabilities in the interview and hiring process. Many Publix employees with disabilities have a long tenure with Publix, helping to secure their future and even their retirement.

Mr. Romano included a reminder in his remarks about the promise made in the Declaration of Independence, that all citizens are equal in this country. And although equal treatment is not yet the norm, businesses that treat people with disabilities as valued members of their workforce are “cashing the check our founders gave them.”

I hope you and your business will be offering work experiences during DEAM and beyond, to the many talented Floridians with disabilities.

Kindest regards,

Dr. Susanne F. Homant, MBA
President & CEO

The Able Trust

Disability Employment Awareness Month
Disability doesn’t discriminate. It impacts people of all races, ethnicities, genders, geographic locations, lifestyle and financial statuses. And many times, individuals with disabilities are left without some of the opportunities we take for granted – the chance to find meaningful employment and save for the future.

However, a number of initiatives statewide are expanding opportunities for these individuals. October is Disability Employment Awareness Month, an ideal time to highlight the economic and social importance of offering opportunities for individuals with disabilities to earn and save money.

Disability Employment Awareness Month activities were established nationally by Congress in 1945, and are celebrated annually in Florida by disability advocates statewide. The theme of the month is at the heart of the Able Trust’s mission to see individuals with disabilities gain and maintain successful employment, contributing to their independence, financial well-being and quality of life. The organization is coordinating one of the most robust efforts to celebrate Disability Employment Awareness Month and getting communities across the state involved. The purpose is two-fold: to provide work experience for individuals with disabilities and to acquaint employers with hiring and working with these individuals. By working hand-in-hand with local organizations, opportunities are being created to allow individuals with disabilities to job shadow or intern at various companies for several months, to gain new skills and contacts that could lead to meaningful employment.

Until recently, achieving employment was only part of the equation, especially for individuals with disabilities who were employed but still required federal benefits to make ends meet. These individuals had limited options to safeguard their financial future, as most federal benefit programs, like Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Medicaid, mandate that an individual with a disability have no more than $2,000 in savings at any time, or risk jeopardizing these much-needed benefits.

In the past year, the Florida Legislature prioritized reform and support for the disability community with a series of bills including a financial literacy program, state employment options, and a partner program to encourage Florida businesses to hire individuals with disabilities. Most notably, the Stephen Beck Jr. Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act was enacted and created Florida’s qualified ABLE program, ABLE United.

ABLE United allows individuals with disabilities and their families and friends to save up to $14,000 per year for future expenses in an investment account, like a Roth IRA or 529 college savings plan, while maintaining government benefits. Whether an individual is employed full- or part-time, receives means-tested benefits now or anticipates a need in the future, ABLE United can help grow assets with tax-free earnings while maintaining the flexibility to spend the funds at their discretion.

Great strides have been made in the state of Florida to help individuals with disabilities contribute to the workforce and achieve economic independence, and Disability Employment Awareness Month reminds us that, from creating employment opportunities to offering a one-of-a-kind savings and investment program, we can help these individuals achieve a better life experience.

For more information about ABLE United, visit http://www.ableunited.com.

Susanne Homant is the president & CEO of The Able Trust. Kevin Thompson is the executive director of ABLE United. Visit www.abletrust.org to view online.
One entity that has accepted that challenge is Publix, a company that received praise from Senator Jack Latvala for being the preeminent corporate citizen when it comes to hiring people with disabilities. Publix Director of Retail Associate Relations, Marcy Benton, elaborated on Publix’s belief in having a diverse workforce that mirrors the community it serves.

“Our commitment to an inclusive workforce is to make sure that all of our associates, regardless of their ability, are valued and appreciated as employees,” she said.

But hiring people with disabilities isn’t just a feel-good measure, Benton continued. They also impact the organization’s bottom line in regard to increased employee morale, decreased absenteeism, and turnover.

“At Publix, we know the true game-changer is employment. That’s how you make a difference in people’s lives and the community,” she said.

Neil Romano, Former Assistant Secretary of the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), said that there is much more that the government can and must do in order to help citizens with disabilities. The fact that people with disabilities are twice as likely to enter abject poverty than any other group in America is a clear indication that there is a need for DEAM initiatives.

“The answer to the disability employment question in America is in this room,” he said. “Employers must look at people with disabilities, and the opportunities they offer, not just as programs, but as an investment.”

The reason why some businesses don’t make the investment is because of their perspective. Some see no potential return on investment; a perception that must change.

If District Secretary for Representative Kathleen Peters, Sarah Goldman, has her way, that change will one day come. Since graduating with a master’s degree from Florida State, Sarah has had difficulty finding a job that would pay enough for her to keep her disability benefits. Sarah cannot accept a job earning over a certain amount, or she would lose the personal care attendants (PCAs) that help her get ready for work each day.

“There are so many barriers that Floridians with disabilities face; in their personal and daily lives,” she said. “The passion I have for this has made me an advocate. After serving as an aide in the Florida House of Representatives, and now as district secretary, I’ve learned about the importance of advocacy and the legislative process.”

Sarah has a simple message for Florida when it comes to hiring people with disabilities.

“Hiring people with disabilities helps us fulfill our passions, bring out our talents, and helps us believe that we have a purpose. We are hard-working individuals who are ready to make an impact on the world.”
Grantee Spotlight: Florida International University
by Guenevere Crum

The School of Education at Florida International University in Miami received a grant from the Able Trust for $65,000 to fund Project Panther LIFE (ages 18-22), and Project Panther PLUS (ages 22-26). These programs will provide employment skills preparation and placement for more than 30 individuals with intellectual disabilities. Thanks to collaboration with community-wide partners and resources, the program can offer a seamless experience from instruction to workplace employment.

Funds from the Able Trust have allowed the Panther LIFE and PLUS programs to have the benefits of a full-time Employment/Community Liaison in partnership with funding from the Best Buddies program. The resources and skills of this liaison position have enabled individuals like Genesis (pictured) to gain internship experiences. To achieve her career goals, she needed a work opportunity that could allow her to polish her communication and organizing skills. Genesis obtained an internship in the Clerk's office at the City of Sweetwater, and found the position to be rewarding.

“I answered phone calls...I am also knowledgeable about the departments in the building, and I am able to refer people to where they have to go,” she said.

A job shadowing and internship guide has been developed for student participants at their new employment/internships sites to use as a resource in tackling basic work site skills and etiquette. Additionally, participants have access to webinars and workshops, all designed to build career skills, options, and job retention for optimal personal success. The Able Trust looks forward to following the achievements of the program as it heads into the second half of the grant year.

The Able Trust has awarded more than $37 million to grantees across the state of Florida, enabling Floridians with disabilities to enter the workforce each year.

Recent Grant Awards

The Able Trust Board of Directors recently met in Orlando and approved three grant awards totaling $162,140.

- Vincent Academy/Van Gogh’s Palette received $54,000 to underwrite the position of Employment Director of Vincent Academy, which will provide employment placement services in Sarasota County to individuals with severe and persistent mental illness.

- North Florida School received $50,000 to provide support of the micro-enterprise business of Barkin’ Biscuits, which will provide participating students business skills in creating, marketing, and retailing the specialty dog biscuits in the greater Duval-metro area.

- Ark Nassau received $58,140 to create Employment Placement Services, which will provide workforce training, placement, and support for individuals with disabilities in rural Nassau County.

Upcoming deadlines for the Grants program are November 10, 2016 (for the Strategic Employment Placement Grants), and April 5, 2017 (for the General Employment Support Grants). For full details and guidelines on how to apply, visit www.abletrust.org and click the Grant Program Information tab.
Florida High School High Tech: Providing Pathways to Education & Employment

by Allison Chase

Florida High School High Tech (HSHT) sets high expectations; encouraging youth with disabilities to consider technology-related and other in-demand careers. HSHT recognizes that preparing for work in the 21st century requires up-to-date information and work-based educational experiences. Exciting career opportunities abound in Florida, whether a student has their sights set on going to a state university, 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 experience that excites and attracts students to in-demand careers. HSHT partners with business and industry through local Business Advisory Councils (BACs) to ensure that program standards align with business needs, and that students with disabilities are part of Florida’s future workforce.

EMPOWERMENT

During the summer of 2016, 395 students participated in internships, 85% of which were paid through a stipend by the employer, the HSHT program site, Vocational Rehabilitation, the local Workforce Development Board, or another community grant provider.

HSHT Internship Partners Include: Fairpoint Communications, Capital Regional Medical Center, the University of Florida, the City of Tallahassee, Publix Supermarkets, Chick-fil-A, Miami-Dade College, Santa Fe College, UF Shands, Walgreens, Baptist Medical, local school districts, city & county governments, and numerous local businesses.

EDUCATION

During the 2015-2016 school year, the Florida HSHT Program served 1,784 students with disabilities in 40 Florida counties. Services were provided in 106 high schools and alternative education settings, including two Department of Juvenile Justice facilities and a foster care site. The Florida HSHT Program experienced a 99% graduation rate for all seniors participating in the program.

EMPLOYMENT

82% of Florida HSHT graduates entered postsecondary education, continuing education, or employment upon graduation. In addition, 258 Florida HSHT students, representing all grades, secured employment through program services.
**Partners Making a Difference: WellCare**

WellCare is one of many financial supporters of The Able Trust’s youth programs and employment initiatives such as DEAM. It is also a company that practices the mission of The Able Trust, providing employment opportunities for Floridians with disabilities.

Headquartered in Tampa, Fla., WellCare Health Plans, Inc. focuses exclusively on providing government-sponsored managed care services (primarily through Medicaid, Medicare Advantage and Medicare Prescription Drug Plans) to families, children, seniors, and individuals with complex medical needs. WellCare serves approximately 3.8 million members nationwide.

WellCare’s vision is to be a leader in government-sponsored health care programs in collaboration with members, providers, and government partners. They foster a rewarding and enriching culture to inspire associates to do well for themselves and others. As a result of this philosophy, WellCare continually strives to help members lead better and healthier lives by strengthening the communities in which they live.

WellCare believes that much of what affects health occurs outside of the doctor’s office. Because of this, organizational advocacy and community-based programs are specifically designed to connect community resources and help members navigate the local social support network to receive the care and services they need.

This is a big reason why WellCare is a supporter of The Able Trust.

Providing work and other career experiences — like internships and job shadowing — is a great way to introduce individuals with disabilities to businesses, and for employers to learn first-hand the skills people with disabilities have to offer, and WellCare is committed to those activities.

The Able Trust salutes WellCare for its commitment to empowering Floridians with disabilities, and helping create opportunities for successful employment through its many internal programs.

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**2016 Disability Employment Awareness Month Sponsors**

![Sponsors Image]

**Richard L. Cole, Jr., Esq. and Barbara Cole**

**2016 SPONSORS**
**2016 Able Trust Holiday Card Contest**

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

**Open Call to Florida Artists!**

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

**Contest Opens:** September 15, 2016  
**Entry Deadline:** November 14, 2016 at 5 PM.

**Format:** Original artwork on paper or graphic design that can be printed to paper no larger than 8 ½ X 11 OR on a high resolution JPEG file.

Artwork should be sent along with an “About The Artist” statement of 50 words or less. The statement should provide personal information 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 December 7, 2016 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 14, 2016.

For more information, visit www.abletrust.org.

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**Follow The Able Trust on Twitter**

- Be sure to receive the latest Able Trust news and events by becoming a follower on Twitter!

- Type “The Able Trust” in your search bar, then click FOLLOW on the bottom-right corner.
Nearly a quarter million dollars was donated by The Able Trust to The Susan B. Anthony Recovery Center, which helps pregnant women and mothers end the cycle of substance abuse for their families. The Able Trust works as a key leader in the state to provide Floridians with disabilities opportunities for successful employment.

“Changing the direction of just one life has the potential to set the next generation of a family on the right path, and it’s impossible to put a value to that,” said Dean A. Dalbery, CEO of the Susan B. Anthony Recovery Center. “We’re honored by the trust and faith The Able Trust has placed in us, and we will do our best to shepherd these dollars prudently to put them to the best use.”

The grant will help fund the Susan B. Anthony Recovery Center’s Readiness for Employment and Placement (REAP) Program that provides education, vocational support and employment placement to mothers recovering from substance abuse. Over three years, the recovery center anticipates REAP to help about 180 participants to obtain full-time jobs and 30 individuals to gain part-time jobs.

“People dealing with substance abuse problems are three times more likely to be unemployed,” said Dr. Susanne Homant, president of The Able Trust. “That’s a worrisome statistic, but it also compels the kind of action the Susan B. Anthony Recovery Center has taken. The REAP program not only gets these women employed, but also looks to make long-term impacts in their lives and the lives of their children.”

The Able Trust will assist with staffing for the program, underwriting a full-time Career Specialist, a part-time Vocational Group Facilitator and a part-time After Care Career Specialist.

The REAP Program is expected to assist 360 individuals with employment services over three years for mothers recovering from drug and alcohol addiction and co-occurring disabilities. The organization, originally started by the Junior League of Greater Fort Lauderdale, has other numerous community relationships including collaborations with CareerSource Broward, United Way, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Broward Homeless Initiative Program and the Broward Sheriff’s Office.

For nearly a decade, The Able Trust has recognized a special group of supporters called “Corporate Champions.” These companies not only embody the mission of The Able Trust through workforce inclusion policies, but also through financial support that has exceeded $100,000 over the years.

Able Trust President & CEO Dr. Susanne Homant (right) presents a $250,000 grant to Susan B. Anthony Recovery Center Board Chair Megan Moore (far left), and President & CEO Dean Dalbery.
Alumni Corner: Sarah Goldman
by Rachael Moulton

Sarah Goldman is a member of the newly formed Able Trust Alumni Association, and serves on the Alumni Association Planning Committee. She has been actively involved with The Able Trust since 2007, when she first attended the Florida Youth Leadership Forum (YLF). In 2008, she began serving as a group facilitator, a position she held for several years. Sarah has also served as the face of the 2012 Disability Employment Awareness Month, and often speaks for The Able Trust at various events. Most recently, Sarah spoke at the 2016 DEAM kickoff event in Tampa, Florida.

Professionally, Sarah is the District Secretary for Representative Kathleen Peters of Florida House District 69. Sarah began in the position recently after working through the job search process.

“Networking was the key for me in finding a job,” Sarah said. “It is so important to put yourself out there, volunteer for organizations, and even create and hand out personal business cards.”

Sarah began networking with two internships over two legislative sessions, meeting and making connections that would ultimately assist in landing her current position.

“People with disabilities face a lot of barriers while finding and maintaining employment,” she said. “I had issues obtaining transportation to get to interviews and employers not being flexible with accommodations.”

Sarah credits The Able Trust for showing her that she can be successful in her future, despite her disability. She has gained personal and professional confidence through her activities with The Able Trust, in addition to a strong support system. Sarah plans to maintain a career in the Legislature and even pursue political office in the future.

“People with disabilities have a lot of policies that need to be advocated for,” Sarah said. “I hope to assist in changing those policies so that future generations can have a much more inclusive path in life.”

Empowering the Future: YLF 2016

by Ray Ford, Jr.

The purpose of the Florida Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) is to bring together high school students with disabilities, creating a network of support while making them aware of the various education and employment resources available to them as they reach the age of independence. The goal is to inspire all participants to strive for the highest level of independence possible.

“YLF helps to allow delegates the opportunity to embrace their disability and provide them with unlimited amounts of confidence,” YLF group facilitator Tyler said.

In addition to learning about disability history and sensitivity, YLF participants learned about business and dinner etiquette, explored STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) careers with more than 20 local business leaders, and visited The Florida Capitol for a mock legislative session, where they debated and voted on a bill.

“After my experience at The Capitol, I’m going to run for office at my school and start getting more involved,” YLF 2016 student Kaia said.

At the conclusion of YLF, each year one student is selected as the recipient of the Joey Alvord Spirit Award, named in honor of one of the first delegates to participate in the Florida YLF who was killed tragically in an automobile accident. The award is presented to YLFers who embody compassion, leadership, and determination.

“I feel that I can build on my leadership skills by being more confident and not giving in to the feeling that I sometimes want to give up,” 2016 Joey Alvord Award winner Kameron said. “I want to help people that are out there with same disability that I have, and be a friend to them.”
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 (check one or both).

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 $37 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, 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.

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.**