
BARRY GLASSMAN
HARFORD COUNTY EXECUTIVE



BILLY BONIFACE
DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATION

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For more information, contact:

Cindy Mumby

Director of Governmental & Community Relations

410-340-5376

camumby@harfordcountymd.gov

Harford County Celebrates Employment of Citizens with Differing Abilities

BEL AIR, Md., (Nov. 7, 2017) - Celebrating the employment of citizens with disabilities, Harford County's Office of Disability Services and Commission on Disabilities honored several individuals and organizations at their annual Employment Recognition Luncheon on October 26 at the Maryland Golf and Country Clubs in Bel Air. More than 160 guests attended this inspiring event honoring employees with disabilities who have exhibited exceptional ability and determination in the workplace. The event also recognizes employers, families, friends and organizations that are changing attitudes about people with disabilities in the workforce. Harford County holds this event in October of each year to coincide with National Disability Employment Month.

This year the theme was "Inclusion drives Innovation," and keynote speaker Cory Richo of the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) moved the audience with his personal story of triumph over the challenges of his disability. Diagnosed at only four months old with cancer of the spine, Richo had an operation to remove a tumor that left him paralyzed from the waist down and with severe scoliosis. At age 15 Richo began having surgeries to correct the scoliosis. Despite these hurdles, he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in computer science.

Later, when his condition worsened and eventually left him blind, Richo did not give up: "As human beings, the one thing we all have in common is the ability to adapt," he said.

Richo said he decided that since his mind worked and he could talk, he could help people the way DORS had helped him. Richo has since completed an associate degree in chemical dependency counseling, a bachelor's degree in theology, and a master's degree in divinity towards pastoral care and counseling. Now married, Richo has been working at DORS for the past four years.

He told the captivated audience, "A failure is only a failure when you stop trying."

The following individuals and organizations received awards and certificates for 2017.

- Large Employer of the Year Award: U.S. Army Communications-Electronics Command (CECOM)
- Medium Employer of the Year Award: Citizens Care and Rehabilitation Center
- Small Employer of the Year Award: Next Generation Mechanic
- Employee of the Year Award: Samantha Amend, employed by Catholic Charities
- Student Worker of the Year Award: Aaron Fender for his volunteer work at Harford County Library
- The Ruth Helen Thompson Community Service Award: Robin Fiastro for her dedication to improving lives of people with differing abilities at Harford County Public Library
- Volunteer of the Year: Lisa Ruley, for her dedicated community service to the citizens of Harford County

Employee Awards of Merit were also given to Ben Smith, employed by CECOM; Brian Blevins, employed by Base Supply Center; Greg Streett, employed by The Arena Club; Justin Hayden, employed by William Paca Elementary School and Outback Steakhouse; Tiffany Corbin, employed by Citizens Care & Rehabilitation and The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region; and Zewdu "Zee" Gebreyesus, employed by McDonald's.

"Citizens with disabilities are enthusiastic and reliable workers," said County Executive Barry Glassman. "Harford County is proud each year to celebrate their accomplishments and the employers who recognize their extraordinary value in the workplace. I would also like to thank our Office of Disability Services and Commission on Disabilities for working year round to provide opportunities for citizens of all abilities."

The Harford County Office of Disability Services and its partners offer an array of programs to connect businesses with motivated, dependable staff, and to connect employees with disabilities to on-the-job training, modification and technology assistance. For more information on employment opportunities, tax credits or other available incentives for businesses that hire individuals with disabilities, please contact Rachel Harbin, director of the

Harford County Commission on Disabilities at disability@harfordcountymd.gov or call 410-638-3373.



Harford County Office of Disability Services and Commission on Disabilities' Employment Recognition Luncheon Award recipients and dignitaries pictured from left, back row: Chad Shrodes, Harford County Council; Anastasios Dernelakis, Small Employer of the Year and co-owner Next Generation Mechanics; Mike Perrone, Harford County Council; Richard Slutzky, president, Harford County Council; and Lydia Brennan representing Harford County Councilman Curtis Beulah; Second row, from left: Rachel Harbin, Harford County Disability Services; David Pickett, U.S. Army CECOM; Brian Blevins, Employee Merit Award recipient; Dimitri Dernelakis; Small Employer of the Year and co-owner Next Generation Mechanics; Robin Fiasco, Ruth Helen Thompson Community Service Award recipient; Amber Shrodes, director of Harford County Community Services; Tiffany Corbin, Employee Merit Award recipient; Jade Gingrich, director of employment policy, MD Dept. of Disabilities; and Zewdu Gebreyesus, Employee Merit Award recipient; Front row, from left: Liz Miranda, U.S. Army CECOM; Greg Streett, Employee Merit Award recipient; Lisa Ruley, Volunteer of the Year recipient; Ben Smith, Employee Merit Award recipient; and keynote speaker Cory Richo, Department of Rehabilitation Services. Not pictured: Samantha Amend, Employee of the Year; Aaron Fender, Student Worker of the Year; and Justin Hayden, Employee Merit Award recipient.

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