

Press Release

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LT. GOVERNOR JENNINGS PROMOTES EMPLOYMENT FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

TALLAHASSEE - Lt. Governor Toni Jennings today, joined by Director of the Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities Shelly Brantley and business leaders, announced an additional six local chapters of the Florida Business Leadership Network in communities in the state. Business Leadership Networks encourage employers to recruit and hire qualified individuals with disabilities. The additional sites are: Jacksonville/First Coast area, Panama City, Orlando, Brevard County, Tampa, and West Palm Beach. The existing chapters are located in Miami-Dade County, Polk County and the Big Bend.

"Businesses across these Florida communities can build on the successes of over 1,000 Florida businesses that recruit, hire, train and retain qualified persons with disabilities," said Lt. Governor Jennings. "By fostering employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, we can empower them to live the American dream. Individuals can become more active in their communities, and employers benefit from hiring qualified and hardworking employees."

As of January 2006, the unemployment rate in Florida is just 3 percent, the lowest in three decades. Yet nationwide, among working age persons with disabilities, 65 percent are unemployed but two-thirds want to work.

It is estimated that over 2.2 million Floridians have a disability. By employing persons with disabilities, employers can effectively position themselves to develop products and services that are more likely to sell to a diverse customer base, resulting in a significant increase in long term profits.

"Persons with disabilities make a tremendous contribution to their communities," said Agency of Persons with Disabilities Director Shelly Brantley. "By offering qualified individuals the opportunity to realize their full potential, employers strengthen their workforce while earning the lucrative and loyal patronage of people with disabilities, their families, and friends."

Governor Bush is a leading advocate for the rights of individuals with disabilities. He established the Agency for Persons with Disabilities in 2004 to support Floridians with developmental disabilities in working, learning and community living. During the last eight years, Governor Bush has increased funding for developmental disabilities by \$827.8 million or 164.6 percent.

Employer-to-employer networks, BLNs communicate with prospective employers to eliminate common myths about employing people with disabilities. Local BLN chapters are members of the Florida BLN, organized by The Able Trust, and the United States BLN.

"Florida leads the nation in organizing local BLN chapters that emphasize opportunities for businesses to come together and address disability employment issues within their own communities." said Katherine McCary, president of the USBLN. "When an employer talks about the benefits of hiring candidates with disabilities, other employers are eager to do the same. The USBLN has seen this business principle breed success for BLN chapters across the country and look forward to modeling Florida's local chapter expansion approach to foster more employment opportunities for citizens with disabilities."

For more information on hiring qualified workers with disabilities or joining a local Business Leadership Network, visit www.MyAbilities.org or call 850/386-2022. For more information on the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, visit <http://apd.myflorida.com>