

Press Release

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Florida Businesses Encouraged to Hire Persons with Disabilities

~Florida recognized as national leader in employment initiatives~

TALLAHASSEE - Business and government leaders across Florida joined persons with disabilities in partnership today to recognize Disability Mentoring Day. Part of National Disability Employment Awareness Month, the event brings together community business leaders as mentors to persons with disabilities interested in exploring employment opportunities. The mentor/mentee relationships help to break down barriers to employment while educating employers on the contributions that persons with disabilities make to the workplace.

"As a mentor, I know firsthand the enrichment that comes from sharing work experiences with an individual who is anxious to join Florida's growing workforce," said Governor Jeb Bush.

Marc Buoniconti served as the Honorary Chair of this year's event. Marc is the son of legendary All-Pro and Hall of Famer linebacker and former Miami Dolphin Nick Buoniconti. He serves as Ambassador for the Miami Project to Cure Paralysis and President of the Buoniconti Fund to Cure Paralysis, the Miami Project's international fund-raising arm. Florida's Disability Mentoring Day program is organized through a collaborative partnership of The Able Trust, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and other statewide partners.

Nationally, Florida has been recognized for initiatives encouraging employers to recruit, hire and train persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities have on average a 65 percent unemployment rate while two-thirds of those who are unemployed would prefer to work. The United States Business Leadership Network honored the Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities with its 2006 Exceptional Partner of the Year Award for partnering with Florida's local Business Leadership Networks (BLN) Chapters, with over 1,200 business members statewide. BLNs are employer organizations promoting exemplary solutions toward the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce and marketplace.

"Florida's growing economy and job market should be open to the largest minority group in our state, persons with disabilities," said Governor Bush. "I challenge every organization to hire a person with disabilities this year -- and another one next year, and the year after that. This effort isn't charity or good corporate citizenship, it's just smart business."

Comcast Cablevision in Tallahassee, a member of the Big Bend BLN, received the national "Employer of the Year" Award from the United States Business Leadership Network. Comcast's efforts include training its supervisors and staff on diversifying its workforce to include qualified workers with disabilities, establishing an internship program for graduating seniors with disabilities through the Leon County Schools' transition program, and hiring students and adults with disabilities in various corporate departments. The company also aired Florida's local BLN video as a public service announcement throughout the state, an in-kind contribution of nearly \$1 million. Comcast Cablevision is the country's largest provider of cable services and one of the world's leading communications companies.

"The local BLNs make employers aware of an untapped source of qualified workers, people with disabilities," said Shelly Brantley, director of the Agency for Persons with Disabilities. "Employers benefit from hiring qualified and hard-working employees with disabilities who have higher than average retention rates. Companies that hire people with disabilities frequently earn the loyal and lucrative patronage of their families and friends." For more information on hiring qualified workers with disabilities or joining a local Business Leadership Network, visit www.MyAbilities.org, or the Agency for Persons with Disabilities at www.apd.myflorida.com.