

Mayor's Council on Disability
Chattanooga, Tennessee
Meeting Minutes
October 5, 2009

Chairperson, John Jackson, Creative Initiative
Vice Chair, Bryon Kluesner, UTC OSD Office
Secretary, Carol Martin, UTK Office of Disability & Employment
Parliamentarian, Jill Hindman, Dev Disability Council, Region 3

Council Members

Sandra Booher, Moccasin Bend Hospital
Jim Queen, CARTA Care-A-Van
Tommy Gates, Siskin Hospital for Physical Rehabilitation
Carolyn Boyd, Signal Centers
Phillip Stevens, City of Chattanooga
Karl Epperson
Nichol Myers, AIM Center
Robert White, Epilepsy Foundation
Katie Jones, Merrill Lynch (Special Needs)

Mayor's Office Participants

Matt Lea, Assistant to Mayor
Jay Piercy, OMA City Compliance Officer
Kathie Fulgham, Mayor's Office

Absent members:

Sandy Booher
Nichol Myers
Phillip Stevens
Katie Jones

Visitors:

William Pykosh
John Kotsis
Aubrey Sullivan
Erskine Oglesby
Azusa Dance
Lana Newton

Chris Jackson
Elaine Adams
Sidney McDonald
Danielle Hooper
Dennis Dodson
Bea Lyons

John welcomed the group and asked the Council members to introduce themselves. He then asked the group if they had any changes or corrections to the August minutes. The Council approved the minutes as submitted.

John introduced guest speaker, Bill Pykosh, IRS Disability Initiative. Bill, a 35 year employee with the IRS, is totally blind. He discussed his service at the IRS and said that to get ahead you need to be better at what you do than anyone else and that you should always do what other people don't want to do. Through the years, Bill was promoted to various positions. He is now the Territory Manager of Stakeholder, Partnership, Education and Communication (SPEC). This organization delivers free income tax assistance to targeted groups, gives outreach speeches, payroll conferences and financial education and asset building conferences. Mr. Pykosh sits on a Diversity Committee which encompasses eight states. This committee tries to improve the diversity and working conditions for minorities within IRS. He commented on the improvement in the acceptance of minorities and people with disabilities. When he went to school, he had to go to a blind school; he was not permitted in public schools. He commented that today the students with disabilities are mainstreamed into the public schools, which is so much better for the student. But, on the job front, although minorities and women have made great strides, people with disabilities have a great deal of difficulty getting a job. Even accessibility for people with disabilities has a long way to go. He discussed VITA, the program that gives income tax assistance to people with disabilities. He introduced Joseph Kotsis, the representative in Chattanooga. The IRS did over 52,000 VITA tax returns last year. He said that the IRS is partnering with the Department of Agriculture to offer food stamps to those who come in to get their VITA free income tax assistance. The VITA sites are accessible. Mr. Pykosh said he is available to speak at any public meeting to explain the IRS Disability Initiative. He can be reached at 615-250-5828 or at William.P.Pykosh@IRS.gov

Jim Queen, CARTA, said that they are getting their new Hybrid buses out in limited areas. They are a little wider than old buses, so they are limited on where they can operate in the city. There may be five to ten more coming to replace older buses. The money for these is from the federal stimulus plan. CARTA may also put out a new bid for three paratransit vehicles to replace some of the aging vehicles. Also, stimulus funds are being used to pave the parking lot. CARTA received a Tigger Grant to replace all of the light bulbs in their facility and that will save \$100,000 per year in energy costs.

Carol Martin discussed the disABILITY in the Workplace Seminar/9th Annual Awards Program that is hosted by the SE TN Placement Consortium and the MCD. The seminar will cover disability etiquette, assistive technology, discussions of employees with disabilities and discussions of employers who hire people with disabilities. Employers are invited as well as anyone else that wishes to attend. For the first year, the employers will be presenting the awards to their own employees. The date is November 17th from 8:30 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. The awards program will take place during the last hour of this program while participants eat their lunch. The lunch will be prepared by a TN Business Enterprises blind vendor. The seminar and the box lunch will be free to all participants.

Lana Newton discussed an upcoming fall training conference of the Volunteer State Rehabilitation Association (VRSA) that will take place October 15th at the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center in Smyrna. The cost is \$35 and includes lunch. The keynote speaker is Ms. Terry from the TN Department of Children's Services. Dr. Steve Zan Ston from the University of Memphis will also speak. There will be conferences on the Wounded Warrior program and Ned Solomon will speak on youth leadership. Regena Burrows, TN DRS and Cathy Houser, DRS Corporate Connections will speak on Mentoring. Lana will be presenting with Michael Warner and Jennifer Miller from the Vanderbilt Deaf-Blind Project. If anyone is interested, contact Lana for applications.

Kathie Fulgham thanked everyone that helped with Go!Fest. She said everything went very well from parking and shuttling to all of the

booth coordination. She said the Art Expo was fantastic and very popular; the entertainment was wonderful; and there were interpreters for the entertainment which was new this year. She said she had a wonderful team and she is really happy that it turned out so well but she is also really happy it is over. She said we can look forward to next year now that we have a formula that works.

Bryon Kluesner discussed UTC's Disability Awareness Month activities. He said he had calendars available for anyone who wanted one. He mentioned that the informational session for the Office for Students with Disabilities Office's July trip was today and there were at least 50 people at the meeting. Lana Newton and Terri Rice brought in food from Great Britain – scones and potatoes and more. Of the 50, there were at least 30 or 35 interested in making the trip. As of now, there are only 15 seats left. They may open it up to 10 more. The Adopt a Disability Day had to be cancelled for lack of interest. He said last year it was a big hit and an eye opener for the folks that participated. This weekend will include skydiving and a haunted house tour. Next week on October 12th, Marlee Matlin will speak in the Fine Arts Center in the Roland Hayes Theater. There will be sign language interpreters and CART Services set up for this. On October 14th, the Student Empowerment Association will be putting information around campus including information about celebrities that have disabilities. On October 20th, OSD is taking a group of 40 students – 20 with disabilities and 20 from the multicultural center on campus to Atlanta for Dialogue in the Dark, a sensory deprivation experience that demonstrates what it is like to be blind. On October 21st at 5:00 p.m. OSD will be showing their documentary from the South Pacific trip in the Signal Center Room on the third floor of the University Center. Everyone is welcome. On October 22nd, there will be a brown bag Workshop/Lunch called Scope Out the Spectrum on Autism. Graduate student, Brooke Stovall and OSD Director Michelle Rigler will be presenters for this hour long session. On the 28th, there will be a silent auction, the first big fundraising even for the July trip. On the 30th, there will be an all day open house in the OSD Office in Frist Hall. There will be a Halloween theme and everyone in the office will be dressed in costume.

John Jackson said that he is going to attend STAND meetings weekly and will update the Council. He said that Kids Like You, Kids Like Me needs Volunteers, specifically teens and adults with physical disabilities to talk to elementary school children. If interested, contact Elaine Adams. He also announced that the Chattanooga Down Syndrome Society Buddy Walk 2009 is Saturday, October 10th at 11:00 a.m. The National Council on Disability is having its quarterly meeting at the Holiday Inn Express in Nashville.

John asked the visitors to introduce themselves.

Bea Lyons, Advocate for Deaf and Hard of Hearing announced that this Friday, October 9th from 9am until 4pm, AIM Center will host a workshop advocating deaf friendly mental health services. Keynote speaker is Steve Hamerdinger, Director of Deaf Services for Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation from Birmingham, Alabama. Professionals wishing to attend can get CEU credit for this. She asked that this be posted on the MCD website. She said this workshop is open to anyone but they must register before the event. The cost is \$30 and includes lunch. Registering the day of the event costs \$40.

Joseph Kotsis, IRS Disability Initiative, oversees VITA, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance in Chattanooga and surrounding area. Joseph also mentioned that he really enjoyed Go!Fest and had lots of folks stop at this booth. Some even volunteered to work with the VITA program.

Carol Martin said that Go!Fest was great and the only negative she could think of was the long line for the food. Kathie said no one anticipated that large of a crowd all wanting food. But, actually the count shows more people attended last year – 4,000 compared to 3,400 this year. Carol also mentioned that she noticed lots more young people with disabilities this year.

Aubrey Sullivan, Education Director at the Epilepsy Foundation announced that this organization has monthly support groups, the first Thursday of every month at Siskin Hospital. She said November

is National Epilepsy Awareness month. She said she is trying to get as many people to host dinners in the Chattanooga area to talk about epilepsy and help decrease the stigma that surrounds that disorder. She also mentioned that one of her clients with epilepsy complained that she could not see the scrolling sign on the front of the bus. Jim suggested that this person sit up closer to the front of the bus. He said that CARTA's advisory commission looked at the signs and determined the size was appropriate especially since there is also an announcement enunciation. If she still has a problem, he suggested working with the CARTA Travel Trainer, Valerie Powell at Siskin Hospital.

Dennis Dodson, Director of the Southeastern Tennessee Depression and Bipolar Support alliance, commented that he was sorry he missed Go!Fest but got rave reviews from a young man with Asperger's that attended. This young man met the young artist with autism that exhibited his artwork; they exchanged cards and he really felt that he made a friend.

Other visitors include:

Danielle Hooper, Chattanooga Area Brain Injury Association, Erskine Oglesby, Tennessee Career Center Disability Navigator, Azusa Dance, Siskin Children's Institute with the Child and Family Research Center, Chris Jackson, TN Division of Intellectual Disabilities. Lana Newton, Program Coordinator for Deaf-Blind Services with the TN Division of Rehab Services.

Karl Epperson said that he has spoken to several people in Section 8 housing about their rents increasing. He said he thought that rents are based upon disability checks and since there will be no increase in those he didn't understand how the rents would increase. It was suggested that Karl contact the HUD Office in Knoxville.

The Council members sent their wishes for a speedy recovery to Sandy Booher and Phillip Stevens, both out on medical leave.

The next meeting is scheduled for November 2nd at 3:00 p.m. at the DRC.

Minutes respectfully submitted,
Carol Martin, Secretary
Mayor's Council on Disability