

Governor's Office of Disability Affairs

On August 26, 2008 we had our first Governor's Advisory Council on Disability Affairs meeting. We had 35 of 36 council members in attendance at the Louisiana State Museum. The meeting was very unstructured, but productive. The council is still awaiting an active Chairperson. The Chairperson must be appointed by the Governor, and while GODA has made a recommendation to the administration of whom that person should be, we are still awaiting official notice from the Governor. Two main issues that the council would like to address are: (1) Issuing a formal letter to the Louisiana Sheriffs and State Troopers offices reminding them of the need to ticket people who illegally abuse accessible zone parking spots, (2) Creating some form of policy that mandates teaching disability awareness in schools, possibly in conjunction with Disability Awareness Month in October.

GODA has been working with constituent services and the Governor to officially declare October Disability Awareness Month in Louisiana. We are pleased to announce that the Governor officially signed the declaration on September 24th, official declaring the month of October Disability Awareness Month. In conjunction with Disability Awareness Month GODA is working with LRS in regards to Disability Job Fairs happening across the state. Either myself or one of the GODA staff will attend every Job Fair.

We have embarked on a tour across the state for the past few weeks. We are visiting every Families Helping Families office in the state. We are also visiting Independent Living Centers and other various disability advocacy groups in each major populated area of the state. The trip has been an eye opening experience for me and the staff. The goal of the trip is to promote active lines of communication between the major advocacy groups of the state and GODA. The trip has been an excellent opportunity to hear firsthand what the pressing needs of the community are. To the date we have visited FHF offices in Baton Rouge, Pineville, Shreveport, Monroe and Thibodaux. We will be visiting with Lake Charles and Lafayette next week.

The 2008 Governor's Outstanding Leadership in Disability Awards packet was mailed out to the community (on September 26th). If you would like to receive a packet please contact GODA. The goal of the awards ceremony is to publicly recognize individuals and organizations who have

achieved excellence. We have secured the Old State Capitol on December 10th. The Secretary of State will be in attendance to help with the Ceremonies and we are working on having both Governor Jindal and Mrs. Jindal there in attendance. Last year we received thirty nominations, it is the goal of GODA to have a minimum of sixty this year so please get involved and nominate.

GODA has spent the majority of its time since August 28th preparing and dealing with Gustav. Cindy Daniel, National Disability Coordinator for FEMA, sent an email applauding the state of Louisiana for its work to prepare and respond to disability community in the wake of Gustav. We had several victories during the storm. We were able to secure an interpreter for the vast majority of Governor's press conferences. I rode out the storm in the Capitol for two nights with some of the GODA staff. We were positioned in the Capitol to answer and help troubleshoot any disability related issues that came up. In the six days after the storm each member of GODA averaged 96 hours of work. I am very proud of the will power and determination demonstrated by our staff

Post storm we had to tackle the issue of Disaster Food Stamps Application Centers. The Application Centers were not acceptable or accommodating by any means. The Governor's office of Disability Affairs worked closely with the Governor's Office of Elderly Affairs to allow citizens with disabilities to apply for disaster food stamps at various Council for Aging Centers across the state. We were able to successfully open six centers in major areas across the state. We worked with Jefferson and Orleans Parish to make their application centers more accessible.

GODA is in the process of restructuring our current web-site. We encourage all groups and advocacy agencies to forward calendar events to us. It is our goal to have a comprehensive calendar of events for the entire disability community.