



Governor's Office of Disability Affairs

The Governor's Office of Disability Affairs hosted the Governor's Outstanding Leadership in Disabilities (GOLD) Awards Ceremony at the Old State Capitol on December 8, 2009. The annual GOLD Awards honor individuals statewide in the disability community for their outstanding achievements. The ceremony was attended by over 220 individuals across the state, including several elected officials and dignitaries. Despite the horrible weather, the event was considered a huge success by those in attendance.

The ceremony featured eleven award winners who were introduced by their nominators. The Educator of the Year Award, Direct Support Professional of the Year Award, and the Veteran of the Year Award were presented for the first time.

The 2009 Governor's Outstanding Leadership in Disabilities Awards included:

The 2009 Patsy Barrett Memorial Award is presented to a woman with disabilities, recognized for her leadership abilities and achievements as a disability advocate.

Recipient: Carole B. Glover, of Lafayette

The 2009 Ken Vince Memorial Award is presented to a man with disabilities, recognized for his leadership abilities and achievements as a disability advocate.

Recipient: Warren J. Chauvin, of Thibodaux

The 2009 Volunteer of the Year Award is presented to an individual who has shown outstanding service through their commitment to enhancing opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Recipient: Whitney A. Langlois., of Greenwell Springs

The 2009 Youth of the Year Award is presented to a young person with a constant disability who has provided encouragement and inspiration to other young people with or without disabilities through their own individual achievement.

Recipient: Lanie K. Warner, of Sulphur

The 2009 Employer of the Year Award is presented to an employer who provides real employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Recipient: Albertsons, of Lafayette

The 2009 Service Animal of the Year Award is presented to an outstanding service animal that assists his or her owner in their day-to-day activities.

Recipient: Picasso, of St. Francisville

The 2009 Family of the Year is presented to a family who has a member or members with disabilities and through their involvement in the community have encouraged each other and families throughout Louisiana.

Recipient: The Watkins Family, of Lafayette

The 2009 Distinguished Merit Award is presented to an individual, organization or firm working in the disability field in recognition of their consistent efforts to provide opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Recipient: Carol Lirette, of Chauvin

The 2009 Veteran of the Year Award is presented to a disabled veteran who has served honorably in the United States Armed Forces, and has a record of exemplary services in the disabled community.

Recipient: Larry L. Jones, of River Ridge

The 2009 Direct Support Professional of the Year Award is given to an outstanding individual who has demonstrated a strong passion to enhance the lives of those they serve.

Recipient: Geneva Ordoyne, of Thibodaux

The 2009 Educator of the Year Award is presented to an outstanding individual who has contributed significantly in educating persons with disabilities in our community.

Recipient: Mary Lynn Odinet Baumgartner, of Abita Springs

With the calendar year ending, our focus has once again turned to mid-year budget reductions. With the state facing a projected 248 million dollar short fall, agencies have once again been forced to look at areas that can weather a further reduction. GODA's state general fund dollars have been reduced by 60% in the last 18 months. We do not expect any additional reductions to the staff or services offered by GODA at this time. GODA continues to rely on the Disability Trust Fund as its main source of funding.

The office of Disability Affairs received over 600 constituent phone calls during 2009. During tough economic times, the disability community of Louisiana continues to search for ways to provide for those in need. The number of phone calls searching for assistance in utility payments has increased dramatically. Also, individuals with disabilities who are in need of pro-bono legal assistance with Social Security appeals and advocacy assistance continue to struggle to find help. Unfortunately, our plans to rejuvenate the Youth Leadership Forum will be placed on hold until funding can be secured.

Our attempt to continue to grow our stakeholders has been extremely successful. We have added nearly one hundred new contacts at advocacy group and disability related organizations. We have continued to work closely with state agencies and legislation to trouble shoot issues and improve the community around us. The Statewide Independent Living Council recently successfully completed their annual 704 Report and the CILs have begun to receive the 1.4 million in ARRA funds which were awarded earlier in the year. Both the Statewide Independent Living Council and the Governor's Advisory Council on Disability Affairs are seeking individuals who may be interested in serving on the councils. If you are interested, or know anyone who may be, please have them contact our office.

With much attention on streamlining since our last meeting, our office continues to work diligently with Legislative committees and other state agencies to find ways to make our state more efficient. It appears, at this time, that the Governor's Office of Disability Affairs will continue to reside within the Governor's Executive Branch.