

Recognizing outstanding businesses

The SRC recognizes the hard work community partners and businesses do to help VR consumers achieve employment. The SRC presents Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access (DEIA) awards to these partnerships at quarterly meetings.

Pacific Opportunities

Portland-based [Pacific Opportunities](#) received the award at the May meeting. This job placement service focuses on adults with barriers to employment. Job coaches and employment specialists work with the business and the new employee.

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) Amy Valdez nominated Pacific Opportunities for the award. Valdez cited several practices that prompted her to nominate Pacific Opportunities for the award:

- 1. Established community-based work assessment (CBWA) sites that can be started in one to two weeks:** The agency partners with grocery and clothing donation sites that allow a client to get started with the VR process immediately when they don't have job experience.
- 2. Streamlined job placement services:** The agency completes all pre-employment services in one month, which saves time for the VRC and client so they can keep moving toward job placement.
- 3. Quality and timely job placements and job coaching:** Several clients and client families have given positive feedback about Pacific Opportunities' thorough and professional support.

Valdez attributes Pacific's success to its staff. She praised Client Services Manager Sid Walker for forming and maintaining new business relationships. "He also takes the time to debrief CBWAs with clients and VRCs, and is professional, courteous and respectful in his communication," she said.

She also applauded Geoarbitrage Specialist Erik Edwards for his positive and professional updates.

Jenni Childs

Hillsboro School District Youth Transition Program (YTP) Specialist Jenni Childs was recognized at the May SRC meeting. Human Services Assistant Vanessa Roberts nominated Childs for going above and beyond for VR clients by helping them get the necessary forms to speed up the eligibility process.

"As a VRC, I appreciate Pacific Opportunities for monitoring transitions to long-term supports and communicating with all parties regarding successes. Pacific makes my job easier, which is not easy. Thank you for all your hard work!"

*~ Amy Valdez, VRC,
Central Portland VR Office*

"Jenni was tasked with taking on the full load of the whole Hillsboro School District Youth Transition Program when there was an abrupt staffing change. She took charge in making sure these youth had everything they needed to succeed. She was very genuine and kind in all communications in person and virtual."

*~ Vanessa Roberts,
Human Services Assistant,
Hillsboro VR Office*



Blackbird Shopping Center in Medford committed to diversity and inclusion in hiring VR clients



Tyler Quitt, general manager of the Blackbird Shopping Center

Tyler Quitt, general manager of the [Blackbird Shopping Center](#) in Medford, says he learned to treat people with kindness from his parents.

“They taught me to look at the personal aspects of someone’s life. I am more than happy to work with people if they want to change and be successful. I am all about that,” he said.

He takes that philosophy to work every day, where he believes in second chances. He is committed to hiring people with varying developmental disabilities, mental health disabilities, people with criminal backgrounds and people with drug addictions.

“Basically, we just want to give people a chance to succeed where no one else may be willing to,” he said.

Blackbird’s commitment to employing people with disabilities earned the business the SRC’s Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility Award during an August 2022 meeting.

“Blackbird’s commitment to diversity and inclusion is certainly amongst the very best in the Rogue Valley and is an outstanding example of what this award truly means,” said Cheryl Timeus, the Vocational Rehabilitation counselor who nominated the business for the award.

The Blackbird Center, located at 1810 W. Main St., is a family-owned business that started as an army surplus and outdoor store in 1965. Today it is an all-purpose place for hardware, automotive and marine equipment, home and garden supplies, outdoor sports gear, and even home brewing supplies.

Timeus said Blackbird has been an excellent partner with VR from the start.



Andrew Johnson at work hanging up clothes at Blackbird.



Blackbird Shopping Center in Medford, Oregon, opened in 1985.

“They really take the time to teach the client the skills they need to do the job,” she said. “They also counsel them and don’t let issues build up. And they are so complimentary. Tyler sees beyond what they can’t do. He’s an amazing individual.”

Andrew Johnson, 35, is one of the Vocational Rehabilitation clients who is now working 15 hours a week at Blackbird. Johnson has a speech disability, which was a barrier for employment in some other businesses. VR worked with Britteny Asher Consulting to provide a communication device to speak for him to help in his job. VR also connected him with a speech and language pathologist he has used for the past 10 months.

Johnson has been working in the clothing and shoe areas of the store since early summer.

“I like working there. I get the best possible experience. My career goal is to continue to grow in my job,” he said.

He is also strengthening his fine motor skills by learning to fold shirts and hang up clothes. And he takes Valley Lift bus to work every day, which gives him more independence.

Another VR client, Brandon Shepherd, 24, has worked full time for the past six months at Blackbird in the hardware and hardwood area. He is living in a friend’s van and hopes to get enough of a tax return next year to rent an apartment with his friend, who owns the van.

“I’m just glad to work. I’m not picky,” he said.

Quitt has only good things to say of Shepherd’s work ethic so far.

“We’re getting great feedback from the team on the sales floor about this man. He continues to outperform himself each and every day,” he said.

Quitt noted not all arrangements work out. Recently Quitt said he let a former VR client go after two successful years working at Blackbird. A recent change in the person’s medication caused him to miss work on multiple occasions, have memory problems and exhibit some negative behaviors in the workplace.

But even then, Quitt left the door open for the person to return.

“I told him once stable, we’ll have a spot for him. I have a personal connection to this man. I want to see success for him. We’ve seen some great success even from people who have moved on. I like that we’re a steppingstone for the next venture.”

