



NEWS RELEASE

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2021 DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AND INCLUSION AWARDS

Five Nebraska VR partners received awards for their role in creating inclusive workplaces and advocacy for disability employment.

The 2021 Disability Employment and Inclusion Awards highlight the successful partnership between Nebraska VR and the businesses and communities they serve. Nebraska VR offers individualized services to help people with disabilities find employment consistent with their interests, priorities, strengths, talents, and choices while working with businesses to find and retain quality employees.

“Recognizing individuals and employers who have embraced inclusion to build successful Nebraska workplaces is particularly important,” said Nebraska Department of Education Commissioner Matthew Blomstedt. “The willingness to give back to your community is a model for others particularly through the challenges of the last two years. Your leadership and support help to assure all Nebraskans have access to learning, earning, and living.” Commissioner Blomstedt also recognized Nebraska VR staff members who provide employment services to clients and businesses.

“We are pleased to recognize an entrepreneur and these business partners during October’s National Disability Employment Awareness Month. All the awardees exemplify this year’s theme ‘America’s Recovery: Powered by Inclusion,’” noted Nebraska VR Director Lindy Foley. “Their dedication and persistence are a model for others. This event underscores the importance of our work together to provide full access to employment and community during our state’s and nation’s recovery from the challenges of the pandemic. The recognition they are receiving is well deserved.”

The Nebraska State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) selected the recipients from nominees submitted by Nebraska VR business account managers and employment specialists.

The award winners are:

Disability Employment and Inclusion Entrepreneur Award: Paul Filsinger – First Impressions Photography – Shelton, NE

Paul Filsinger used Nebraska VR’s self-employment program to receive a business feasibility study, a business plan, start-up costs, and guidance to open his own business, First Impressions Photography in Shelton, NE. He photographed weddings, family portraits, proms, and wildlife. Four of his photographs were featured in Nebraskaland Magazine. Before his untimely death in October of 2020 after a 7-week battle with COVID-19, he was also very involved in the community. Filsinger helped the Historical Society organize and digitize old photographs, created a Facebook page for Shelton’s Lincoln

Highway Festival Car Show, designed promotional posters for events, and photographed first responders during Kearney's Cruise Night.

Disability Employment and Inclusion New Business Partner Recognition Award: Pristine Clean Commercial Cleaning – McCook, NE

Pristine Clean Commercial Cleaning owners/operators, Steve and Rachelle Kotschwar, grew their business from cleaning a couple of churches for extra spending money to employing forty people to clean more than fifty facilities. They started their McCook, NE based business in 2015 and have expanded their business to serve surrounding communities. In September of 2020, they began partnering with Nebraska VR to meet their staffing needs and provide work-based learning experiences for students.

Disability Employment and Inclusion Small Business Recognition Award: Cornhusker Auto Center – Norfolk, NE

Cornhusker Auto Center in Norfolk, NE sells new and used cars, has a service and detail department, and employs almost 100 people. The dealership has partnered with Nebraska VR since 2019 and provided local high school students with work-based learning experiences. Management has gone above and beyond to provide modifications like checklists, so students know their job responsibilities and the tasks to be completed. In addition, Cornhusker Auto Center has hired a student after his completion of a work-based learning experience.

Disability Employment and Inclusion Large Business Recognition Award: The Lincoln Marriott Cornhusker Hotel – Lincoln, NE

The Lincoln Marriott Cornhusker Hotel has been a downtown staple since the 1920s and caters to travelers with upscale accommodations, food, and event space. The hotel encompasses the meaning of true partnership and has been a Project SEARCH host site for up to ten interns for five years. While hosting the nine-month internship program that trains students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, the interns are immersed in the working culture of the hotel. The hotel has hired five of the student interns upon graduation over the years.

Disability Employment and Inclusion Large Business Recognition Award: Lincoln Williamsburg Hy-Vee – Lincoln, NE

As a longtime Nebraska VR partner, Williamsburg Hy-Vee often provides work experiences for students and adults. The store welcomes job candidates with disabilities with open arms providing support, guidance, and mentorship to ensure successful employment. Throughout the pandemic, they continued to provide opportunities for students and clients. Through on-the-job training nine out of the ten clients successfully find employment.

Nebraska VR is an office of the Nebraska Department of Education.

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