



NEWS RELEASE

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2024 SRC Disability Employment and Inclusion Awards

Photos of the winners are available at:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/16KeW5Gvxle8FLJvxOVZZzzbmHJLJTl9M?usp=sharing>

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

The 2024 SRC Disability Employment and Inclusion Awards highlight the successful partnership between Nebraska VR and the businesses and communities they serve. Nebraska VR offers individualized programs to help people with disabilities find, keep, and advance in employment consistent with their interests, priorities, strengths, talents, and choices while working with businesses to find and keep quality employees.

“Individuals with disabilities, like all Nebraskans, want and deserve a welcoming and supportive workplace with access to meaningful work,” said Governor Pillen. “Although our state continues to have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation, individuals with disabilities are an underutilized talent resource who can meet the hiring needs of Nebraska businesses. These businesses should be celebrated for their leadership and partnership with the Nebraska VR program.”

Nebraska Commissioner of Education Dr. Brian Maher also commended those receiving the award. “Recognizing individuals and employers who have embraced the value of providing opportunity for Nebraskan students and adults with disabilities is an important model for others,” said Dr. Maher. These partnerships help individuals with disabilities have meaningful employment and provide a good life for themselves and their families. He also recognized Nebraska VR staff members who provide services to students, clients, and businesses.

“We are pleased to recognize one of our successful self-employment entrepreneurs, three business partners, and a Champion of Disability Employment during October’s National Disability Employment Awareness Month. All the awardees exemplify this year’s theme ‘Access to Good Jobs for All’,” said Nebraska VR Director Lindy Foley. “The recognition they are receiving for providing this access to good jobs 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 awards are presented during October’s National Disability Employment Awareness Month. The Council is comprised of individuals who have an interest in working with Nebraska VR to ensure the needs of Nebraskans who experience a disability are met in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

Disability Employment and Inclusion Entrepreneur Award – Nick Natale, Cryptic Tattoos, Scottsbluff, NE

Nick Natale, artist and owner of Cryptic Tattoos, found his passion for body art when his father returned from the Navy with his first tattoo. He was immediately drawn to the art form and began drawing and illustrating with the hope of one day applying his design skills. After seeking Nebraska VR Self-Employment Services, he launched his business serving the Panhandle and surrounding states in 2017. He provides a full spectrum of custom design tattoos as well as tattoo removal and has now nearly doubled his original financial goal. Nick has built a successful body art business which has allowed him to provide for his family, save money, reinvest in his business, and feel prepared for unplanned expenses. His wife, Dezy, assists with bookkeeping, making appointments, and other duties. The couple has found opportunities to support their community through donating gift certificates for various fundraising events.

Disability Employment and Inclusion New Business Award – Pinkelman Truck and Trailer, Norfolk, NE

Pinkelman Truck and Trailer has kept their customers on the road since 2010 by meeting the need for fleet services, repairs, trailer services, and maintenance work. This partnership began when Business Account Manager Angela Korth reached out to Manager Nick Johnson. They discussed a client's interest in exploring jobs matching his interests and the business's need to cover various duties in the shop. After a business tour, Pinkelman hosted an On-the-Job Evaluation (OJE). During the experience, Pinkelman Truck and Trailer was open to discussions about accommodations and work hours to meet the needs of the client and welcomed a job coach to ensure success. The client, who was hired after the OJE, is happy in the job and proud to wear the Pinkelman uniform alongside his co-workers.

Disability Employment and Inclusion Small Business Award – Community Christian School, Scottsbluff, NE

Community Christian School in Western Nebraska is a school with 130 students enrolled from pre-school through eighth grade. Additionally, the school provides daycare for 40-50 children ranging from infants to pre-kindergarten as well as after-school care. Pre-School and Daycare Director Michele Kuxhausen has provided business tours and mock interviews for client job seekers. Michele is willing to meet with students receiving Pre-Employment Transition Services and job seekers interested in exploring careers in this field. In addition, Community Christian School has hired three Nebraska VR clients in the past year.

Disability Employment and Inclusion Large Business Award – Embassy Suites By Hilton Hotel, Lincoln, NE

Embassy Suites by Hilton Lincoln hosts guests every day and events such as Do the Dock, wedding receptions, career fairs, business conferences, and large parties throughout the year. Additionally, the hotel has hosted Lincoln Public School students for Project SEARCH for the past thirteen years. Student interns gain real-life work experience through workplace immersion in their last year of high school eligibility. The hotel has eleven current employees, two hired in the last year, who participated in the program. These former interns work in competitive integrative roles in various hotel departments including housekeeping, laundry, banquet, kitchen, complimentary breakfast, and front desk. General Manager Bryan Sullivan takes job candidate referrals for open positions and provides worksite tours for adult Nebraska VR clients as well.

Champion of Disability Employment Recognition Award – Michael Bursaw, Kearney, NE

Michael Bursaw, Director of Global Operations Human Resources at West Pharmaceutical Services, Inc. in Kearney, fosters a culture of hiring, retaining, and advancing individuals with disabilities. He has led his company and community with dedication, expertise, and a relentless commitment to creating a more inclusive and accessible world. Michael is an active volunteer in supporting veterans, serving on the Board of Directors for the Kearney HelpCare Clinic, organizing annual pinewood derby events for the local Boy Scouts of America troop, and raising money for an inclusive playground. He participated in business panels about inclusive hiring practices, presented at the northwest regional meeting for the Corp of Engineers to highlight the challenges for individuals with invisible disabilities, and volunteers as an ambassador in West Pharmaceuticals Employee Business Resource group. As a previous two-term member of the Nebraska SRC, Michael served as a Chairperson, assisted in re-writing the SRC by-laws to ensure the Council was productive and focused, and led outreach efforts to state legislators and human resource managers about the Career Pathways Advancement Project grant.

[Nebraska VR](#) is a state agency within the Nebraska Department of Education. Nebraska VR helps people who experience a disability prepare for, find, and keep a job while helping businesses recruit, train, and retain employees with disabilities. Award winners were chosen by the [State Rehabilitation Council](#) (SRC) Employment Committee from nominees submitted by Nebraska VR Business Account Managers and Placement Specialists.

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

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