I cannot believe that this will be my final pondering as president this year!!! Where has the year gone??!! Like they say, “time flies when you are having fun” and that has been the case for me this year. It has been an honor to serve as your President. Having this opportunity to serve as VRA President was one of my greatest professional achievements. I also want to take this opportunity to thank those individuals who were helpful, supportive, informative and collaborative in assisting me during this year. Even though this is my last pondering as President, I look forward to my continued involvement with VRA and the opportunity to network with such wonderful colleagues.

Here are just a few things that deserve to be highlighted during this my last quarter of service. You will see that this is a great time to be a member of VRA where we have opportunities for networking, professional development and most of all FUN!! Let the pondering begin…..

Fantastic Golf Tournament this year!! Thanks to Howard Green’s hard work, skills and leadership, we had a lot of fun and an increase in our fundraising from the previous year. Remember, money raised from the golf tournament is the primary fundraiser that supports the advocacy and legislative work of VRA. I also want to thank the Golf Tournament Committee Chair-Liz Smith, as well as the other committee members, Jean Steveson, Beth Groff, Margie Millner and Toni Smith. You all really made the difference this year in increasing our hole sponsors. Howard thanks you, and I thank you and we hope you will continue to work with us next year! Now, if we could just get the weather to cooperate next year….Howard, do you know anyone we could talk to???

We began November with the 2014 Collaborations Conference!! What a wonderful way to start the holiday season. This year we were back at the beach, but at the luxurious Hilton Oceanfront!!! It was absolutely fantastic, especially with all the holiday decorations and a view of the ocean. We had everything from outstanding sessions to lessons on how to take a “selfie”. What more could you ask for? While at the conference, we also held our Annual Business Meeting. The meeting was well attended and we enjoyed a great lunch sponsored by VRA. This year we also
initiated the presentation of the 5 “VRA gives back” Collaboration Scholarships. Rob Froehlich announced the results of our election and VARL and VRCEA announced their award winners. As always, Andrew Stowe provided us with an overview of VRA’s activities over the past year. Thanks Andrew!! And last but certainly not least, we celebrated the great news of our beloved Eleanor Williams being elected as the President of NRA in the year 2016! We are so proud of you Eleanor and know that you will do an excellent job!! This year was really an amazing conference and I must take this opportunity to personally thank the collaborations Steering committee for all they did to make this year’s conference such a great success. I think this was just the greatest year ever. This is most certainly due to the great leadership of our Committee Chair-Rob Froehlich as well as Jean Steveson, Co-chair.

You all have set the bar very high for next year’s committee members. Jean and Rob, we thank you for your strong leadership as well as the tremendous amount of work that you put into making the conference such a success.

In closing, I would like to say again…what a great time to be a VRA member!! If you can, please join us at our next Board Meeting on Friday, December 19, 2014. We need you to help us celebrate and plan for an even better 2015. We cannot do it without you!!!!!

--Submitted by Kim Shepard

### VRA News

#### What Benefits are there to Joining VRA?

I have been a member of VRA for over 30 years and have found it very beneficial to me in both professional and personal areas of my life. I have met so many people and traveled to both state and national conferences. I have been able to develop skills working as a committee and board member that I don’t always get to do in my job. I have learned that I am not alone in my frustration nor in my commitment to serving people with disabilities.

VARL has allowed me to focus on Leadership Skills through serving as Division Board member, Committee chair and President. I have worked with many talented people from across the state. It has been so nice meeting others with the same desire to develop themselves as leaders, regardless of their positions.

Membership has allowed me to maintain current knowledge and training at a reasonable cost by attending sponsored trainings and the Collaborations Conference. I feel I am a part of a bigger cause, and appreciate the mentorship and friendship I have received from my fellow members.

--Submitted by Naomi Aitken
VRA 2014 Collaborations Awards

Kristi Lockhart is the recipient of the 2014 Corbett Reedy Award for Excellence. Kristi has used her creative mind to serve youth in transition and to develop programs that will enhance the employment opportunities for youth who are exiting high school or post secondary education. She serves Virginia’s DRS transition caseloads as well as the 120+ schools systems, sharing her creative ideas, offering support where needed and advocating for youth in transition to become independent and employed. She provides training for VR counselors, DOE and local education agency staff. Kristi is not afraid to push the envelope, to see to it that youth in transition have every opportunity to succeed in today’s world. Congratulations Kristi!

In February 2011, as a young man, Eli suffered a stroke. Eli has shown incredible dedication to his rehabilitation. He has consistently worked very hard, always challenging himself. As a result of his stroke Eli battles hemi-paresis on his right, dominate side. Eli is an artist and has taught himself to draw using his left hand. Eli’s works are now featured in his own Etsy store. In June of 2014 Eli became employed part time at Walgreens. He has quickly become one of the most valuable employees there. Eli demonstrates exceptional initiative, work ethic and motivates those around him. Congratulations Eli Dimsey this year’s VRA Distinguished Award Recipient.

Recipients from left to right are: Dr. Robert Froehlich, Eli Dimsey, and Margie Millner

The Don T. Johnston Award is given out each year to a VRA member who exemplifies the qualities of our former president. Margie Millner stepped up to fill the membership chairperson and awards coordinator. This was a huge undertaking, but she assumed this role with great passion and energy. Margie was also vital to the coordination of social and networking opportunities throughout the state to encourage new memberships and provide networking opportunities. Margie volunteered to work on the newly and successful formed golf tournament committee. She secured many new sponsors in the community that will continue to be resources for our association. Margie was there every step of the way making a huge impact on the success of VRA this year. Congratulations to Margie Millner, recipient of the Don T. Johnston Award!

Every year, in honor of the first Commissioner of the Department of Rehabilitative services, The R.N. Anderson award is given to a current member of the Virginia Rehabilitation Association who has demonstrated excellence in services to persons with disabilities. This year’s winner possess an in depth knowledge of vocational rehabilitation, a passion for enhanced service provision, a quiet yet highly effective
leadership style, a demeanor that draws people to their leadership, an infectious laugh and a keen sense of humor. This award is given to Dr. Robert Froehlich. Congratulations!

--- Submitted by Donna Bonessi

**Virginia APSE 2014 Collaborations Awards**

2014’s APSE Professional Award goes to Stephanie Carter with Career Support Systems. APSE Small Employer of the year is LTC (Long Term Care) Solutions. APSE Medium Employer of the Year is Bon Secours Memorial Regional Medical Center Birthplace. APSE Large Employer of the Year Award Goes to Amazon.

Every year APSE recognizes an individual who gains meaningful employment through supported Employment. The 2014 Personal Achievement Award goes to Eileen Braxton.

--- Submitted by Donna Bonessi

**Virginia ACCSES 2014 Collaborations Awards**

Staff Awards for Recognizing Excellence in Service to People with Disabilities:
Viola Whitehead, Linda Sturdivant, and John Tauesch

ACCSES Employer of the Year – Dr. Michael Summers

--- Submitted by Donna Bonessi

**VRA Foundation Scholarships**

Shaquanda Baker
“I am currently finishing up the course work for a master’s in rehabilitation counseling with hopes of becoming a certified rehabilitation counselor. The scholarship will be of great assistance to me in paying for books this semester. ”

Matthew Overbay

--- Submitted by Andrew Stowe

Erica Stowe
“I am honored to be chosen again as a recipient of the VRA scholarship award. As you know, funding for graduate school is not easy to come by and I am grateful for the opportunities that the Virginia Rehabilitation Association Education Foundation provides.”
Dawn Scott has worked at The Choice Group as a Vocational Counselor and a Lead Vocational Counselor since September 2011. She began her involvement with the VRA over two years ago and has assisted with the Membership Sub-Committee during this time also. She is an active VARL member as well as a participant with various transportation, health and safety, collaborative and diversity committees within the Charlottesville, Richmond, and Culpeper areas.

In her spare time, she enjoys spending time with her family, traveling, mountain biking, and home improvement projects. Dawn lives in Ruckersville and commutes to various locations throughout the state for providing career support, training, and employment services.

Dawn has a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration, with a concentration in Human Resources and Business Management from James Madison University. She felt strongly about helping people and determined that true leaders learned how to serve in order to live a successful life! Becoming a VRA member was important to Dawn in order to grow in her career and she soon realized that the support and development as a professional within the VRA community continues to provide networking and collaborative opportunities that would not be possible without the inspirational and valued relationships that have been forged through this association. Dawn will be taking on the NewsNotes Editor position and is looking forward to serving the VRA and its current and future member!

--Submitted by Dawn Scott

VRA Gives Back!

VRA initiated the offering of financial gifts to five VRA members attending the Collaborations Conference. The recipients’ names were drawn on site at the VRA Annual Membership Business Meeting.

Recipients left to right are: Lynn Harris, Beth Groff, Vera Hansley, Mary Kaye Johnston and Alison Mundy.

--Submitted by Mary Kaye Johnston
Points to Ponder by a Long Time VRA Member

In the mid 80s, I found myself in a professional jam. I had finished my VCU Degree in Rehab Counseling and did very well. I was working for a private rehab company and doing well. Passed my CRC by a whisker, but passed! I had a wonderful wife, a baby boy who was the apple of my eye, yet I felt stuck in my growth. My company sponsored me to do a Myers Briggs workshop where I affirmed that I'd likely do well in jobs related to teachers, salesmen, and pastors-I’m not making that last part out and over the years I have become kind of an evangelist of sorts. A feature of the workshop on the last day was to have a one on one session with our instructors-one of whom was our own Dick Luck who was the Director of WWRC and now works with DDS and another fellow whose name escapes me. I led the session with a pretty ego centric line like ‘I’ve got it going on’ on so many levels, yet I’m stuck. Oh how little I knew then!!!!

My gurus immediately challenged me by asking who knew anything about me; I was my own best kept secret. I wasn’t engaged in the community and being stuck was largely my fault for not reaching out to see how I could help others, above and beyond the work that I did.

In grad school, I had been in the student chapter of VRA, but had not followed up - I guess I thought I was too busy. So my gurus suggested that I pick a group and work so that other folks would see what I could do and I could develop my skill set by giving more to others..................... I re-upped with VRA-paid the full price rather than the cheap student rate-and began to go to some meetings. Some of my colleagues in both the private and public sectors were engaged in VRA and immediately I felt comfortable. I knew a bit about accessibility, raised my hand, and 'poof,' I became the chairperson of the Accessibility Committee. I was able to see how to work a committee and saw other leadership skills exhibited by other VRA leaders. Pretty soon, I had a bunch of new friends and colleagues, a brochure that promoted accessibility-I actually still have it I think-and all of sudden I was not my own best kept secret.

I continued to serve on the Board and attended sessions and learned. I've done fairly well since then and much of my success is due to my VRA membership, which gave me a great environment to grow professionally, and I should add, I had a real good time learning.

I hope you can take advantage of supporting VRA with your time and talents. It’s an organization that surely helps our Commonwealth’s efforts to assist Virginians with disabilities find employment and independence.

--Submitted by Jim Rothrock
On behalf of the Legislative Committee, it is my pleasure to report on Committee activities this year. I would like to begin by thanking members of the Legislative Committee, Becky Bowers-Lanier and Liz Smith.

Federal legislation
The majority of the focus was on SB 1356 which impacted the VR program on many fronts. This Bill went to the Senate floor on June 25th, passing on a vote of 95-3. Subsequently HR 803 passed with a vote of 415-6 on July 9th, 2014. The result of these legislative measures, have brought us to our current legislation, now known as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA). Letters were sent to Senators Kaine and Warner expressing the viewpoint of VRA and advocacy advisories sent to members encouraging them to express their concerns as well.

Caveats of the passage of these Bills include a six year reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act and a reauthorization of programs authorized under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended:
- Blended funding on 15 employment related programs
- Maintained RSA in the Dept of Education
- Relocated funding and administration for IL and NIDRR to HHS
- Diluted the CSPD standards and placed funding Title IV funding for In-service Training to discretionary versus mandatory funding lines.
- 15% of VR allocations to be directed towards Transition funding
- Restricted the use of subminimum wage certificates (14C) and created new language for Section 511 and the placement of individuals with disabilities into sheltered settings earning less than minimum wage. This was by far the most controversial issue contained in this legislation.

The Final Rules will be available on 1/18/2015.
In a separate issue, the TACE centers were defunded as a result of a Notice of Proposed Priority. A letter was drafted and sent to the Honorable Janet LaBreck, Commissioner of RSA. Despite advocacy from many, the TACE centers were defunded effective 9/20/14.

Virginia General Assembly activity
The Virginia General Assembly continues in special session, having begun the session in June and convening twice since then, in September and in November. They have not officially adjourned the special session, having several judgeships up for vote. Some of the lobbyist pundits believe that they could possibly adjourn the 2014 Special Session just in time to convene the 2015 session.

The first convening of the special session, in June, was called to pass a biennial budget bill. The budget (HB 5002) is similar to the budget bill introduced by Governor McDonnell, except that most of the additional spending in that budget bill was stripped. Medicaid expansion was not part of the passed budget bill. Funding for vocational rehabilitation services was essentially flat-lined from the 2012 biennial budget.

In September, the Governor issued an order to expand Medicaid without drawing down the federal funds designated by the Affordable Care Act. The plan, the Governor’s Access Plan (GAP) uses $40 million in leftover state funds to expand coverage to those without insurance, particularly children of state employees who otherwise would qualify for Medicaid or FAMIS. Virginia is seeking a §1115 demonstration waiver from CMS to
provide outpatient wrap-around services for uninsured individuals with serious mental illness. GAP has the potential to reach an additional 25,000 individuals.

In October the Governor executed a series of actions designed to address the budget deficit of $2.4 billion that has been created primarily because of cuts in defense and other federal spending affecting primarily Northern Virginia. The immediate impact on DARS spending was relatively minor except for cuts to centers for independent living, personal care services, and brain injury services. However, this was only the first round of cuts and others will follow once the General Assembly returns for the 2015 session (January 14, 2015).

The Governor’s economic advisors met Thanksgiving week and predicted a very uncertain future. As a result, the Governor declared the budget situation “perilous.” Senator John Watkins, who has indicated that he will not run again in 2015, went so far as to suggest that the General Assembly re-visit some tax issues, including the car tax, which, when “repealed,” actually reverted to the General Assembly to fund localities the amount that they lost due to the car tax repeal. As Watkins indicated, the House of Delegates is not likely to look with favor on any measures that would appear to raise taxes. That may mean that further budget cuts will be necessary, and some policymakers have indicated that K12 and Medicaid could be on the table. Transportation funding is not. We hope that VR funding will remain intact. And advocates for the prior cuts in DARS funding have been vocal in their work to restore funding.

The next budget action will be the Governor’s on December 17th. Hearings on the budget amendments are scheduled for January 7, 2015. More on that as information becomes available. The General Assembly has a solid Republican majority in both House and Senate. While the House has a veto-override majority, the Senate does not. Further, 2015 is an election year for all 140 members of the General Assembly. We will continue to look after the VR funding interests and protect to the extent possible, general funds allocated for rehabilitative services.

VRA Membership News

The VRA membership efforts have flourished in 2014!

Under the guidance of Susan Green, the “VRA Friend” initiative has continued as a driving force aimed to connect and encourage new VRA enrollees to get involved and continue their future memberships. With the VRA Friend initiative, a current VRA member is assigned to a newly enrolled member for their first year of participation. The assigned VRA friend then offers monthly contacts, VRA news and updates, and invitations to get involved with VRA trainings and activities. This outreach helps to build future alliance, professional networks, and VRA involvement.

“Giving Back” is the VRA membership theme for 2014. Many examples of giving back were demonstrated as part of our membership drive over the past year.

--Submitted by Bonnie Henn
Strategically, VRA hosted socials and information sessions in connection with professional trainings and meetings held across the state over the year. Such socials and informational sessions were provided in an effort to capture the audience and to share the benefits of becoming a VRA member. Through giving back in this format, VRA had an increase in new membership—particularly in the Eastern region.

As part of giving back incentives, VRA held a raffle for members where five lucky winners received sponsorship of $200 each to support attendance at the Annual Collaborations Conference.

Additionally, each new VRA member is allowed to attend one VRA sponsored training during their first year of tenure at no cost. As with the other giving back incentives, this encourages professional development, networking, and continued membership.

The unique membership efforts of VRA were recognized nationally as Kim Shepard and Mary Kaye Johnston were invited to provide a “go to” training for NRA Membership Chairs across the United States. In this training, the VRA Friend and Giving Back initiatives conducted in Virginia were outlined and suggested as effective membership drive models for other states to utilize.

VRA Foundation Update

The VRA Foundation has had a great year and since our capital campaign kickoff at Collaborations last year we have raised over $2,500.00, which has been added to our endowment fund. With the interest received from our investments we were able to award $1,100.00 in scholarships to three deserving VRA members or family members. That increases our total of awards since 1985 to about $19,000.00. The VRA Foundation’s mission is to provide scholarships to deserving VRA members and their families so that they can defray educational costs. This is a wonderful benefit of your VRA membership. Scholarship applications are available on the VRA website and are accepted on an ongoing basis.

The 2015 capital campaign began in November at Collaborations and will continue throughout 2015. Our goal is to raise at least $3,000.00. A mailing has been sent out to all VRA members, friends of VRA and past recipients to appeal for donations. These funds will be used to supplement our investments and the interest received will be used for future Foundation scholarships.

The Foundation Board members this year include Margaret Gillispie, Chairperson, Bill Burnside, Vice Chairperson, Mark Fletcher, Secretary, Dale Batten, Treasurer, Mary Kaye Johnston, Bonnie Henn, Howard Green and Member Emeritus, Al Dickerson. Next year Bill Burnside will serve as Chairperson. The Board’s hard work and dedication to the VRA Foundation is much appreciated.

We want to thank VRA for the ongoing support of the Foundation and our activities.

The VRA Foundation is accepting applications for Foundation scholarships on an ongoing basis until Jun 30, 2015, for the 2015 scholarship. The Foundation provides Grant In Aid to deserving VRA members and their families so that they can defray educational costs and to further their education. Award recipients will be notified about awards by August 1. The scholarship criteria and application are available on the VRA Website.
This is a wonderful benefit of your VRA membership so please share this information with the students in your family and consider applying for one of the scholarships.

--Submitted by Margaret Gillispie

### VRA Election Announcements

Thank you to all of the 2014 Candidates who agreed to run for office this year and a big thank you as well to all those VRA Members who voted. The results of the VRA 2014 Election are in and are as follows:

**Board Members**
- Beth Groff
- Shawn Zimmerman
- Chuck McElroy

**Treasurer**
- Eleanor Williams

**Secretary**
- Adair Jensen-Smith

**President Elect**
- Dale Batten

On behalf of the VRA Board I want to welcome all of the VRA Board Members. I am certain 2015 is going to be an excellent VRA year!

--Submitted by Rob Froehlich

### VRCEA Update

VRCEA announces election results! Congratulations to the following Officers and new Board Members:

- Bonnie Henn - President
- Marie Worley - President Elect
- Karen Akers - Secretary
- Mary Kaye Johnston - Treasurer

Board Members, Class of 2017:
- Paula McMahon
- Kathleen Shifflett

**VRCEA Spirit Award recipient, Emily West**

--Submitted by Mary Kaye Johnston
VARL Update

Hello VRA and VARL members:

VARL is the part of our organization that emphasizes the leader in all of us. In these busy times, leadership is more important than ever.

VARL membership is at its lowest in almost 10 years. We know that much of our lost membership is members who have retired. Many of us on the Board have been involved in VARL since its inception. We are looking for younger professionals in our field to join us and become the new leaders for the organization.

We meet about once every quarter – and we host training opportunities at about the same rate. We are looking for individuals who want to grow their skills and help others grow skills at the same time.

As I end my two years as President, I can honestly say that while I love my work and I love the other members of VRA - I am not the innovative, energetic and devoted leader I once was. There are lots of neat things happening in our field and we are on the verge of a new way of doing business – Employment First, new CMS rules on settings for both residential and day options, more use of social media and new technologies… these are areas that young professionals excel in and will move us forward as professionals in both VRA and VARL.

Please take a moment to think about your own leadership options. VARL is one safe way of learning your way. Many of us more seasoned veterans cut our teeth on learning to lead through our professional association and YOU CAN TOO.

Naomi Aitken is poised to take over as the President of VARL in 2015. It is her second stint as President, just as this has been mine. We hope you will reach out to either Naomi or myself and join our group ---- VARL has a reputation for being leaders nationally (often leading in membership with NARL) and with your help, we can move back into that role again.

--Submitted by Shirley Lyons

Other News & Notes

Brain Injury Services Coordination Unit Award Federal TBI Award to DARS

DARS was awarded a four-year federal systems change Traumatic Brain Injury Grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) for the period June 1, 2014 through May 31, 2018 at $250,000 / year ($241,630 for the first year). The Brain Injury Association of Virginia is the primary subcontractor on DARS’ federal grant, along with subcontractors James Madison University (Year 1) and University of Virginia (Years 2-4). Virginia’s project, entitled “Facilitating Access to Care and Enhancing Services (FACES) in Virginia,” focuses on continuing to build and enhance the State’s infrastructure for brain injury service delivery in unserved / underserved areas across the State, particularly in rural locations. Further, the project strives to address the needs of veterans; persons with low
socioeconomic resources; and individuals with challenging behaviors. Grant efforts will be conducted within the framework of the four required federal grant priorities:

**Information and referral:**

Individuals and their family caregivers will receive information about brain injury and guidance on accessing services and supports that maximize their recovery, independent living, and coping skills.

- Annually, more than 5,000 newly injured individuals reported to the Virginia Statewide Trauma Registry (VSTR) for treatment of a brain injury – and their family caregivers - will receive timely outreach assistance (i.e., information on brain injury, referral to services / supports).

- Annually, at least 250 persons with brain injury and their family caregivers who request information in response to outreach conducted through the Virginia Statewide Trauma Registry will receive high quality, individualized information that improves their knowledge and understanding of brain injury and assists them in identifying service needs and how to access to systems of care and supports in Virginia.

- Annually, a minimum of 30 family caregivers will participate in a forum designed to facilitate networking, information sharing, and training on how to access services and supports.

**Professional training:**

Through increased professional knowledge and understanding of brain injury identification and treatment approaches, survivors, family members, and caregivers will benefit from enhanced functional outcomes and the development of new or more effective implementation of service models and techniques.

- Conduct an annual educational conference that provides targeted training for more than 50 brain injury or other professionals.

- Provide a minimum of four webinars / web-based training opportunities on screening for brain injury by non-brain injury professionals; neuropharmacology; behavior support approaches; and identification and treatment of concussion, including sports concussion.

- Conduct a biennial “State Report Out Day” to cross-train and educate state agency representatives and other stakeholders on the needs and challenges of Virginians with brain injury.

- Update the Virginia Brain Injury Council’s 2010 neurobehavioral “white paper” to create an authoritative reference document that documents statewide needs and costs
related to the behavioral health treatment for persons with brain injury; evaluates systems options and alternatives; assists policymakers and service providers to clearly understand the issues, and provides a sound basis for decision making related to future policy initiatives.

Screening:

Increasing the understanding and implementation of brain injury screening among human services professionals statewide will result in the referral of Virginians with brain injury to more appropriate services and services, thereby enhancing outcomes for survivors of brain injury. This will be achieved by developing / providing educational information and resources (including a webinar, described in Targeted Effort #2 above) on the importance of effective screening, and through implementation of three pilot projects targeting targeted human services organizations (i.e., Community Services Boards; Area Agencies on Aging; Centers for Independent Living, Free and Charitable Clinics).

- Provide education and training materials on the purpose and importance of screening for brain injury to human services program staff within targeted provider groups that include but are not limited to community-based mental health, aging, independent living, and low income healthcare programs.

- Establish training and implementation protocols in targeted provider groups at eight (8) pilot sites across Virginia to incorporate a simple brain injury screening instrument at intake, and provide training and guidance documents for subsequent steps to follow when a brain injury diagnosis is suspected.

Resource facilitation:

Build the capacity and effectiveness of state-funded brain injury services programs, particularly case management and information and referral programs, by providing access to a central directory of statewide resources, services, and supports; creating an on-line form (listserv) for state-funded programs that encourages sharing of information, resources, and techniques, as well as problem-solving and strategizing; and facilitating peer mentoring and networking interactions through regular video teleconference and face-to-face meetings.

- Develop and maintain a shared statewide “electronic resource directory” for all state-funded brain injury programs, using information from the “Brain Injury First” statewide software system currently under development by DARS.

- Create a “moderated list serve / forum” for information and referral and case management staff within state-funded brain injury programs that facilitated the sharing of resources and strategies and problem-solving that enhances access to, and quality of, brain injury services.

- Maximize the effectiveness of state-funded brain injury program administrators and direct care staff through meetings to enhance program operations, data collection, and service delivery.

- Use data from the “BI First” statewide software system and from BIAV’s Information and Referral activities to gather “real time” information on available resources, services and supports, as well as on current needs and service gaps. This will be of tremendous benefit to direct services providers, state agency personnel, survivors, family members, and other stakeholders, and policymakers.
DARS, as the lead state agency for coordinating brain injury services, is the recipient of the federal grant. Patti Goodall, Ed.S., CBIST, Manager of DARS’ Brain Injury Services Coordination Unit, serves as the Project Director and Donna Cantrell, was hired as the Federal Grant Program Specialist. The Virginia Brain Injury Council, serves as the advisory group to the grant and receives regular quarterly updates on grant goals and achievements at its quarterly meetings. Further, Council members are encouraged to participate in grant activities as appropriate and feasible. For more information on the grant, contact Donna at Donna.Cantrell@dars.virginia.gov or (804) 662-7600.

--Submitted by Patricia Goodall

BRILC Complete 69 Home Modification Projects

The Blue Ridge Independent Living Center, Roanoke, VA is a private, nonprofit organization that assists individuals with disabilities to be independent. We also work with the community to ensure it is accessible to all. During the period October 1, 2013 through September 30, 2014, BRILC completed 69 home modification projects using $204,725 in grant funds from various sources including funds from HUD’s Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). The home modifications assisted individuals with disabilities to remain in their own homes and community.

--Submitted by Karen Michalski

RESNA – Catalyst Project

An important Assistive Technology (AT) resource for consumers and professionals both across Virginia and nationally is the RESNA Catalyst Project. Located in Arlington, the Project serves as a technical assistance provider to the Virginia Assistive Technology System and the Assistive Technology Loan Fund Authority (ATLFA).

The RESNA Catalyst Project is funded under the Assistive Technology Act of 1998, as amended. The Project’s mission is to provide technical assistance to all AT Act Grantees through increasing awareness, access, acquisition, and advocacy to AT devices and services for consumers with disabilities of all ages. The Project works with the 56 statewide AT programs, the 57 protection and advocacy for AT programs, and 39 alternative financing programs. In addition, the Project works with 19 states to assist with their Access to Telework financial loan programs, which includes the ATLFA.

Information about these AT Programs and AT Services can be accessed at www.resnaprojects.org. This website provides a comprehensive central location for AT information and resources nationally. The RESNA Catalyst Project is directed by Joey Wallace, Ph.D., former VATS Policy and Funding Specialist and ATLFA Executive Director. The RESNA Catalyst Project is a sponsored project of RESNA, the Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America. RESNA operates the Catalyst Project through a grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration, U.S. Department of Education.
For general feedback or inquiries about AT Program services and resources, please send an email to Catalyst@resna.org or call 703-524-6686 ext 304.

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Submitted by Joey Wallace

### RCEA Representative

John W. Lui, Ph.D., MBA, CRC, PVE was recently elected to the RCEA Board as an At Large Member, representing the Mid-States. John is the Director of Research and Knowledge Mobilization (KMb) at the University of Wisconsin–Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute (SVRI). He is the Co-PI of the RRTC-Evidence-based Practice in Vocational Rehabilitation Service Delivery, and key partner in the WI PROMISE grant. He has had many leadership roles with National Rehabilitation Association (NRA) and its Professional Divisions.

John is known in the areas of Benefits Counseling, Managed Care, Ethics, Case Management, and Absence Management. John states his RCEA goal is to actively engage in activities that will promote and support RCEA’s Mission and to advocate for membership issues from his geographical area. John can be reached at LuiJ@uwstout.edu.

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Submitted by Mary Kaye Johnston

### WWRC Updates

**Health Occupations**

Congratulations to our Health Occupations (HO) program which was recently featured in the Richmond Times Dispatch. [http://www.timesdispatch.com/entertainment-life/health/medical/teens-with-asperger-s-syndrome-transition-into-adulthood/article_9ce83c73-e947-58b0-9137-14de57524c67.html](http://www.timesdispatch.com/entertainment-life/health/medical/teens-with-asperger-s-syndrome-transition-into-adulthood/article_9ce83c73-e947-58b0-9137-14de57524c67.html) Wes Seaton, Business Development Manager from the Central Region, brought a group of Nurses and Human Resource people from Medical Facilities of America (MFA) and American Health Care for a tour of the Center. They are extremely interested in hiring any students who graduate from WWRC. They are so interested, in fact, that they have given Pam Moore and Kim Spilman, HO instructors, copies of their prescreening materials that all applicants are given during the hiring process. These prescreening materials deal with personality and life choices. Pam and Kim are incorporating this information into their class on Job Seeking Skills to better
prepare students for the application process and employment; teamwork and community partnerships at its best. The Department of Labor currently lists Health Occupations as a number one growth job in the next decade. The rehab rate for the program is currently 100% and graduates are averaging just over $9.00 an hour.

**Building Trades and Maintenance Building** Trades has moved into a new space at WWRC. Students and staff are working hard to set up shop and keep projects and vocational skills learning on track. Grand Opening is scheduled for November 14; please come visit us. Jacob Stratton graduated building trades on August 18, of this year. He started full time employment at Blue Ridge Mountain Cabinets in Rocky Mount, Virginia, on Monday, October 20. The rehab rate is 60% and graduates are making just over $8.50 an hour.

**Materials Handling** Our clients are getting internships and employment with Lowe’s. We’ve added another type of forklift called a pallet truck that expands the employment options for our clients (pictured at right). New to the programs advisory board is Jason Treadway, Placement Counselor from the Christiansburg Office, (pictured below) who has extensive experience in equipment operations. He, along with our staff, will continue to tailor our programs to the statewide employment needs. We have two local 7-Elevens with which we regularly work as intern-ship sites for Materials Handling students. The rehab rate is 77%, and graduates are making an average of $8.40 an hour. Pictured below is Tim Swortzel, the owner of the local 7-Elevens and Nkyia Artis, Materials Handling student. Tim said, “I'm thrilled to have these great future employees as interns and offer internships, as well as referrals/references with other 7-11 stores in our clients’ home communities.”
Food Service Training

Our clients have been busy doing live work preparing some meals for our guests as they learn the fine art of preparing for food service and culinary jobs across Virginia. They cooked and served for the “Top Ten Counselors Luncheon,” as well as the Christiansburg DRS office tour of WWRC. Matt Hooven (Pictured at right) responded to the question “Why Woodrow for this program when there are options for on the job training in the food service industry?” He said, “On the job training may work for some clients, but the training is often very specific to the one area an employer has available. WWRC’s program gives clients a well-rounded experience, plus live work in multiple internship sites, and most importantly, the ServSafe certification which employers instantly recognize as a “real plus” in a job seeker.” The rehab rate is 82% and graduates are making an average of just under $8.00 an hour.
New Boat Dock Dedication
Commissioner Rothrock was at WWRC on September 29 and dedicated our new boat dock to former Commissioner Al Dickerson. Staff, clients, and guests heard Jim’s reflections on Al’s celebrated career and the significant contributions he made to people with disabilities. The lake is used, not only for leisure time activities for clients, but to help clients build strength and confidence as they prepare for work and life on their own. The Wilson Community Park and Star Trail are open to the public and can be reserved for Agency staff who would like to use these facilities.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sujUMdXBqU&feature=youtu.be
Success Stories

Business and Information Technology
Business Information Technology is happy to report that Lee Marks, a recent program graduate, is now successfully employed with Versability as a Digital Imaging Generalist in their Hampton facility. He began work at Versability on July 24, 2014, making $12.00 an hour, 40 hours a week. His job duties consist of scanning images digitally onto a computer and then labeling and data entry. DRS counselor, Donna Enos and Placement Counselor Nancy Santiago both worked to help facilitate this employment outcome. Nancy spoke to the supervisor at Versability three times, and each time he expressed his respect and appreciation for Lee as an employee, stating that he was “one of the best guys in the department.” Lee’s case was successfully closed on October 22, 2014. The rehab rate is 75% and graduates are making an average of $8.50 an hour.

Medical Services
While WWRC has made strategic shifts to emphasize its role in DARS as a vocationally-focused Center, it is important to make sure our counselors are aware of the important options that Medical Rehabilitation Services has in place to support this mission. Ron Burleson is a cattle farmer and nursery owner from Orange County who was referred to WWRC for a Medical Rehabilitation Program after suffering a stroke. He received a Physical Medicine Evaluation by our PM&R physician, Occupational Therapy (OT) (medical program, assistive technology, and driving), Physical Therapy (PT) (medical program, assistive technology, and work assessment), and Case Management services while at the Center. During his program, he remained involved in operations of the farm from a distance. DARS provided funding for modifications to Ron’s truck following his medical program, which allowed him to resume daily work roles at home and in the community. Community and farming friends temporarily supplied various technologies to advance Ron’s business participation. An interdisciplinary team, including OT, PT, Rehab Engineering, AgrAbility, and a couple of farm owners/friends provided a home/worksite visit to evaluate specific tasks required to productively return to his business. Multiple recommendations were generated that should allow Ron to return to full-time operation of his business. Due to the services provided by the
Agency, including WWRC, he has already been able to return to various roles and responsibilities of his daily living activities full time and modified business activities part time. Additional accommodations are in progress to advance his work involvement to full time.

--Submitted by Jackie Davis

Amazon Fulfillment Center Among State Employers Honored for Championing Disability Employment – from the Governor’s News Release dated October 29th, 2014

The Amazon Fulfillment Center in Chesterfield County, which has hired more than 40 clients of the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), was among the Virginia employers honored this month for outstanding commitment to hiring and supporting people with disabilities in the workplace.

DARS held six awards ceremonies across the state to recognize Virginia’s champions of disability employment and to celebrate October as Disability Employment Awareness Month. The final awards ceremony was held today at Stratford University in Virginia Beach. Previous events were held in Central Virginia, Northern Virginia, Southside, the Peninsula and the Shenandoah Valley.

“Virginia prospers when all of its workers have a chance to contribute to our great Commonwealth,” said Governor Terry McAuliffe. “These employers deserve credit for providing job opportunities to individuals with disabilities, but the real reward for these businesses is a productive, capable, vigorous workforce committed to high-quality products and services and a stronger economy that benefits everyone.”

Among the 30 Disability Employment Champions Award recipients this year are:

- Amazon Fulfillment Center, Chesterfield County
- The Hershey Co., Stuarts Draft
- Skookum Contract Services, Fort Lee
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA), Norfolk
- Walmart Supercenter, Stuart
“These employers cut across a variety of economic sectors, from commerce to manufacturing to retail,” said Dr. William A. Hazel, Secretary of Health and Human Resources. “The jobs they create enable workers with disabilities to learn skills, earn wages and engage with coworkers and their communities.”

DARS’ Division of Rehabilitative Services offers vocational rehabilitation to assist people with disabilities to prepare for, secure, retain or regain employment.

“This month raises awareness about disability employment issues and honors the many diverse contributions of Virginia’s workers with disabilities,” said DARS Commissioner Jim Rothrock. “Truly advancing disability employment is about much more than just hiring; it is about creating a common ground of career opportunities and a continuum of inclusion in the Commonwealth.”

This year’s theme for National Disability Employment Awareness Month is “Expect. Employ. Empower.” Learn more about this national campaign to raise awareness about disability employment issues and the contributions of America’s workers with disabilities at [http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/ndeam/index-2014.htm](http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/ndeam/index-2014.htm)

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Submitted by A.J. Hostetler

**NRA – Advocacy Needed Now!**

As you know, on Tuesday, July 22, 2014, President Obama signed into law the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). WIOA contains, as Title IV, the Rehabilitation Act.

For a comprehensive overview of WIOA’s changes to the Rehabilitation Act, please go to: [http://www.help.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/?id=a6347a77-f014-4877-bd5b-47775a3f83c3](http://www.help.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/?id=a6347a77-f014-4877-bd5b-47775a3f83c3)

The link will take you to the HELP Senate Committee website. On this page there are links to the Statement of Managers, including a Section-by-Section Summary of the Legislation, the entire bill and a one page summary.

While WIOA makes a number of changes, none is more troubling than the lowering of the academic qualifications from a master’s degree in rehabilitation counseling or a closely related field to include bachelor’s degrees in business administration and human resources (Section 412(a)(4)(B)).

Lowering the standards for rehabilitation counselors shows a serious misunderstanding about the work of the rehabilitation counselor. A background in business or human resources may be helpful at the job placement stage of an individual’s rehabilitation, but it does not prepare an individual to work with a person who has a significant disability such as autism, blindness, cerebral palsy and so on. It does not prepare an individual to assist a person with a disability to identify essential assistive technology such as augmentative communication devices or refreshable braille displays, and more important, a background in business or human resources does not give the individual an understanding that people with disabilities can work in a wide range of jobs.
not commonly regarded as positions a person with a significant disability can perform. We need counselors with the very best professional preparation, not the barest of minimum training.

But the Congress said that more flexibility will make the rehabilitation program better, but it is hard to see how lowering the standards will lead to better, more effective services. As a rehabilitation community, we must not allow WIOA’s changes to the personnel standards to diminish the importance of rehabilitation counselors having the training they need to assist individuals with disabilities to prepare for and secure high quality employment, including work in nontraditional jobs. All of us—rehabilitation professionals and consumers and their families—must be actively engaged in the development of WIOA’s implementing regulations. This is why it is urgent that we reach out and encourage our colleagues to join the National Rehabilitation Association. Our collective voice needs to be heard. Ask your colleagues to go to our website and join in the effort to preserve the best in rehabilitation counseling – YOUR ADVOCACY IS NEEDED NOW!

--Submitted by Fred Schroeder, Executive Director of NRA
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Connect with other members of VRA!

Do you have a story to share? Go to the VRA member LinkedIn discussion board. This is a secure, professional networking site devoted to issues and interests of our members. VARL also has a site for leadership topics.

  VRA LinkedIn Network: http://www.linkedin.com/groups?mostPopular=&gid=2114298
  VARL LinkedIn Network: http://www.linkedin.com/groups?mostPopular=&gid=2613703

Network with other members of VRA by joining the VRA Facebook group! Members can discuss VRA issues and upcoming events on this social networking website:

https://www.facebook.com/?ref=home#!/groups/258928867454860

Please visit VRA.org

Please be sure to visit the new and improved VRA website at www.vra.org for important information about NRA and VRA news, updates on trainings and events, access to NewsNotes online, and photos of past VRA events!

VRA Events Calendar

Mark your calendars for these important dates for your state and national associations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dec 19th</td>
<td>VRA Board Meeting; Aging Division Building, 1610 Forest Avenue, Suite 100, Henrico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 2014</td>
<td>VARL Elections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 9th, 2015</td>
<td>10am-12pm; VRCEA Board Meeting, Richmond</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 11th</td>
<td>VARL Board Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 22nd-24th</td>
<td>2015 NRA Government Affairs Summit, Alexandria</td>
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<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>VARL Annual Training and Meeting, Richmond</td>
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<td>Sept 9th</td>
<td>VARL Board Meeting</td>
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<td>Sept 14th</td>
<td>VRA Golf Tournament, Stonehenge Golf and Country Club</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 5th-8th</td>
<td>2015 NRA Annual Training Conference, Biloxi, MS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 9th</td>
<td>VARL Board Meeting</td>
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Deadline for next issue’s NewsNotes articles is determinate upon the schedule of the VRA Board meetings in 2015

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