Greetings, VRA members and friends!
I wanted to start by saying what an honor it is to be VRA President for 2018. I am really excited about this upcoming year and all that VRA is looking to accomplish. To give you a little bit of my background, I have been working in VR for 13 years, starting as a Vocational Counselor with The Choice Group and working my way up to the Director of Operations and Training with my organization. I have been involved with VRA for numerous years, serving as the Secretary for multiple years and most recently as President Elect. Under the tutelage of Past President, Margie Millner, I have been studying and preparing to jump into the role of President while supporting the mission of VRA: To promote issues that enable persons with disabilities to participate in the mainstream of society, to provide opportunities for professional development for persons in the field of rehabilitation and independent living.

After a long, long, LONG winter that seemed like it would never end, spring is finally here and VRA has already been busy springing into action this first quarter. We had our first meeting in January and our wonderful Board members and committee chairs have begun working hard on the things we hope to accomplish this year. As President this year, I hope to focus primarily on diversifying our fund raising to help support the various activities that we provide throughout the year such as membership meetings, trainings, legislative support, and our wonderful VRA Gives Back initiative. My hope is that we will be able to have a 5K later this year to promote VRA, encourage members to meet and greet from across the Commonwealth, and just have some fun! Stay tuned for more information about this as we work towards getting this off the ground.

Many thanks to all of the hard work of our Officers, Board, committee chairs and of course the membership for your continued participation – I couldn’t do it without you and look forward to working with you all!
VRA Division and Committee News

VRA Foundation Scholarship – Submitted by Dale Batten

Are you a member of the Virginia Rehabilitation Association? Are you or a family member attending college? Are you aware of the VRA Foundation Scholarship? Each year the Virginia Rehabilitation Association Education Foundation requests applications from interested and eligible members or family members in consideration for the VRA Education Foundation Scholarship.

The application may be found on the VRA Website on the Foundation link. Applications are due by June 30th... so don’t delay!

For additional information contact:
Dee Dee Batten
Dale.Batten@dars.virginia.gov
804-662-9792

VRA Membership and Communications Committee – Submitted by Dawn Scott, Committee Chair

Committee Members:
Chair: Dawn Scott
Kate Gariepy – Co-Editor for NewsNotes,
Tuana Smoot-Hairston – membership support
Sue Collins – website and Facebook, info@vra with MK
Rhonda Chandler – membership support; awards
Tiffany Jenkins – awards

The Membership and Communications Committee has held two separate meetings using the application, ZOOM, for face-to-face communication regarding goals and objectives for the 2018 year! Thus far, although attendance has been low, all attendees have enjoyed this more interactive way to communicate and some very creative problem solving has come out of these meetings.

Membership is low, however we are excited to learn after this most recent VRA Board meeting, that NRA has a new system that will allow the Membership Committee to access information directly and have the most up to date information at our fingertips! The Membership Committee will plan on reviewing these lists and sharing information with the divisions and leaders within VRA directly. We will be sending reminders to lapsed members and finding new ways to initiate programs along with NRA on professional and student membership increases.

Communications within VRA relies heavily on Email Blasts and we ask all VRA members to please consider sending MORE and MORE articles for submission. We enjoy hearing the compliments and comments on the
‘live’ streaming of events and not having to wait until the Newsnotes is released quarterly for updates on events, topics of discussion, legislative news, new members being welcomed on, etc. We are also using Facebook more and more for sharing these relevant articles and would like to invite you to LIKE the page to follow and get more information regarding VRA events and topics of discussion.

I would like to thank every one of the Membership and Committee members who share their time and effort to make the VRA website work, VRA Email Blasts, reminders and membership emails, Facebook posts, and more. We have a strong team this year and we are looking forward to working more on initiatives to retain more members this year and collaborate as an association so that we can all access the value that VRA brings to our networks.

**VRA Membership Committee – New Member Highlight**

Welcome Sarah Storck!!
She is a Job Placement Counselor in the Roanoke DARS Office where she has worked for just under two years. Prior to that she was a Job Coach with an ESO. She is also currently in grad school for Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling at WVU. When she’s not working or doing school work, she likes spending time with friends and family, preferably at a beach or lake!

If you want to be highlighted in our next edition, submit a brief paragraph about yourself and send it to our NewsNotes Editors at NewsNotes@vra.org.

**Other News & Notes**

**Virginia General Assembly Crossover Update**

We are now halfway through the 2018 General Assembly Session with over 3,000 bills heard in committees over the last five weeks. February 13th is crossover, when all of the bills that passed the House “crossover” to the Senate and vice-versa.

This year, Medicaid Expansion and the regulation of utility prices are among the most discussed topics. The first half of the session yielded early signs of bipartisanship and compromise on the issue of grand larceny. Governor Northam and Speaker Cox announced that they reached an agreement to raise Virginia’s grand larceny threshold from $200 to $500. Last week a bill to create a work requirement program for Medicaid recipients passed out of House Appropriations 22-0. This action is considered to open the door for continued discussions on Medicaid Expansion.

**VRA’s Legislative Priorities**

This year we are primarily monitoring legislation and budget amendments related to Long-Term Employment Support and Extended Employment Services. **HB 916 (Landes)** and **SB 560 (Hanger)** would significantly shift the funding mechanisms for community-based services. This legislation would move funding currently available for community-based employment and allow it to be used for sheltered workshops. Both bills have passed the House and Senate and were referred House Appropriations and Senate Finance respectively. VRA is working with partners to educate legislators about these efforts as a serious step backwards.
We are also supporting budget amendments to increase funds for vocational rehab, 329 #4h (Heretick) and 329 #4s (Marsden). Both amendments would provide $1,000,000 during FY 2019 to reduce waiting lists. Whether or not either of the VR amendments is put into the House Appropriations or Senate Finance budget amendments will be known on this coming Sunday, February 18th, when the committee budget amendments are released. Holding our figurative breaths on that!

The disAbility Resource Center Update -- Submitted by Kimberly Lett, Program Coordinator/Deputy Director

The disAbility Resource Center of the Rappahannock, Inc.
409 Progress St., Fredericksburg, VA 22401
540-373-2559 (voice), 540-5890 (CAPTEL), 540-373-8126 (Fax)
www.cildrc.org
drc@cildrc.org

DATE: March 29, 2018
Contact: Kim Lett, klett@cildrc.org or 540-373-2559

The disAbility Resource Center is celebrating its 25th Anniversary this year. Founded in 1993 the dRC is Center for Independent Living (CIL) that assists people with disabilities of all ages to live independently in their community and promotes community inclusion for all. The dRC and the 16 other CILs work toward helping Virginians with disabilities and the community to understand that people with disabilities have a voice and a choice and should have the independence to make decisions about their lives.

The dRC has been doing this for the past 25 years in the greater Fredericksburg area (the city of Fredericksburg and the counties of Caroline, King George, Spotsylvania and Stafford) under the care of its current and past two Executive Directors. Faith Smith led the dRC in its early years, followed by Rob Boyd. In 2005 Debe Fults took over the helm of the dRC and she continues to lead the dRC and the community towards embracing independent living for all.

As with all CILs, the dRC provides independent living skills training, advocacy, peer counseling, transition services (to those leaving institutional care and to students leaving high school), and information and referral. The dRC also provides several other services to its community including deaf and hard of hearing services, youth services, weekly health and wellness exercise classes, Medicaid waiver facilitation and case management, the Equipment Connection (a durable medical reuse program), and a wide variety of trainings that inform and support people with disabilities, their families and caregivers, and the community. In addition, the dRC staff networks and participates with numerous community organizations to optimize our outreach.

The dRC provides some services to underserved communities near the Fredericksburg region. Deaf and Hard of Hearing services are provided to Virginia’s Northern Neck area and to Planning District 9 which includes Culpeper, Orange, Madison, and Rappahannock counties. In PD9, the dRC provides outreach, Medicaid Waiver facilitation, information and referral, and advocacy. Carolyn Savina, csavina@cildrc.org, is the dRC contact in this area. dRC services are offered at no cost, although some trainings and events may have registration fees to cover the cost of speakers and to fundraise as the dRC is a non-profit organization.
The dRC plans to continue to inform, guide, and help people with disabilities and to help the communities we serve to realize the ABILITIES of individuals with disabilities for many years to come. Anniversary celebrations will continue throughout 2018 culminating with a 25th Anniversary Ball on October 20, 2018, in Fredericksburg at the Fredericksburg Expo Center.

In April, the dRC is holding two of its major annual events, Walk ‘n Roll Fredericksburg and the Independent Living Expo. The Walk ‘n Roll is a disability inclusion and recreation event along Fredericksburg’s Heritage Trail on April 15 from 11:30 to 3:30 with the walk beginning at 1 p.m. Participants walk and roll using wheelchairs, roller skates, bikes, strollers, walkers, and scooters and they can participate in the Disability Awareness Cache Hunt set up along the trail by an Eagle Scout. It is an opportunity for people with disabilities and their families and friends (including 4-legged friends) to share social and recreational time together in the great outdoors. In addition, it is an opportunity to share an awareness of the abilities of people with disabilities with the greater community. There will be a DJ, food, kids’ games, and a Not-So-Level obstacle course. Registration for the event can be found at https://getmeregistered.com/walknrollfredericksburg.

The Independent Living Expo will be held at the Fredericksburg Expo Center, 2371 Carl D. Silver Parkway, on April 28 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and feature vendors that provide the community an opportunity to see, touch, try and learn about services of all kinds that help people with disabilities to live an independent life. Vendors include Sorenson Communications, Clear Captions, Dominion Waiver Services, Canines for Disabled Kids, Bright Day Transit Services, FR conversions, Inc., Ainsley’s Angels, the Choice Group, Yielded Notions, Mobility Works, ABLEnow and PHI Air Medical to name a few. The event is free to the public. Anyone wishing to become a vendor is welcome. Contact the dRC at 540-373-2559 or email drc@cildrc.org. Future 25th anniversary plans include an art show by people with disabilities; developing videos that showcase the dRC’s work, independent living, and community inclusion; and continuing to provide workshops on topics of interest to people with disabilities, their families, and providers. Current workshops include Mommy and Me Sign Language classes from April 13 to May 11; Basic Sign Language classes from May 1 to June 5; Sibshops on April 13, 20, and 27; Chronic Disease Self-Management Program from May 3 to June 7; and trainings at the Culpeper Library on May 18 on Medicaid Waivers, Ticket to Work and What is a Consumer-Directed Personal Attendant. Keep posted to the dRC website, www.cildrc.org, Facebook and Twitter for information on our October celebration and future activities.

Congratulations!!

Kathryn (Kathy) A. Hayfield was appointed by Gov. Ralph Northam as Commissioner of the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services.

Kathy has been with DARS for more than two decades. As many of you know, she most recently served as Assistant Commissioner and Director of the Division of Rehabilitative Services. Prior to that, she held various positions, including work as the agency’s liaison to the Virginia General Assembly, working closely with Lt. Governors Beyer, Kaine and Hager.

Kathy also was the first Assistant Commissioner to provide leadership to the Community Based Services Division at DARS, leading a diverse statewide system of community based programs for the agency, including brain injury, independent living, assistive technology, case management, assistive technology loan fund authority, personal assistance services and employment support services.
As a long-time member of the VRA, Kathy was recognized at the 2016 Collaborations Conference with the R.N. Anderson award for excellence in serving people with disabilities. Kathy is very supportive of VRA as a professional organization for vocational rehabilitation and as a strong advocacy group. She added that she looks forward to an ongoing partnership to assure quality services for Virginians with disabilities.

**Wilson Workforce Rehabilitation Center News and Updates! -- Submitted by Jackie M. Davis, WWRC Representative**

**Jobs Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center’s Work-Based Learning Conference**

On March 13-15, 2018, Rick Sizemore, Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRC) Director, and WWRC graduate, Chris Hall, attended the Jobs Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center’s Work-Based Learning Conference in Dallas, Texas. Rick had the great honor of being on a panel with our local Workforce Board Director, Debby Hopkins, and the Director of the Arkansas Career Training Institute. However, the star of this panel was Chris Hall. This National Conference was so excited about Chris and his success that they wanted him to be the focus of a panel presentation and a poster session. The conference was attended by some of the Country’s top leaders in VR and they are very excited about the model at WWRC and our alignment with the Federal Department of Labor’s Standards for a Pre-Apprenticeship Training program, and the fact that Chris has moved through the program and is working at Hershey where he is positioned to work as a registered apprentice.

Here is our new podcast with Chris discussing his job as a Production Operator, along with Debby Hopkins and Todd Cook discussing apprenticeships. [http://vrworkforcestudio.com/hershey-vocational-rehabilitation-pre-apprenticeship-training-registered-apprenticeships/](http://vrworkforcestudio.com/hershey-vocational-rehabilitation-pre-apprenticeship-training-registered-apprenticeships/)

**USA Today Interviews Former WWRC Student**

There was nice article in the USA Today newspaper recently about one of WWRC’s graduates, Kaylee Merrick, who now works for CVS in Stafford, Virginia. You can check out the article and a short video, which is truly remarkable, [at this link](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/us/2018/08/09/williamsburg-virginia-student-finds-work-force-training-her-program-of-choice/1205832002/). While the story didn’t get into the role of VR in Kaylee’s experience, it was nice to see one of our graduates featured in such a positive way. CVS is featuring this along with other recent articles about “mock stores and the nations comprehensive centers” as part of their social media outreach.

**Employers Tour WWRC**
Nate Mahanes, Blue Ridge District Business Development Manager for DARS, and the WWRC Foundation sponsored an employer tour of WWRC on Thursday, February 1. Thirty guests toured the facility and were oriented to WWRC’s programs and familiarized with the Center’s alignment with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and the focus on measurable skills gains and workforce credentials. James Hall, WWRC’s Career and Workforce Development Director and Dr. Sharon Mullen, Education Principal and Workforce Credential Specialist, described the workforce driven nature of the programming and overviewed the career pathway approach, as well as WWRC’s status as a Local Educational Agency of the Virginia Department of Education. Employers from Lowes, Capps Shoe Manufacturing, Thermo Fisher, and numerous others were especially appreciative of learning that students from their areas are referred to WWRC for training, and then tracked back to the home community where placement staff can assist in connecting them with local businesses and industry. Capps Shoe Manufacturing’s Human Resources Manager was particularly interested in the Manufacturing Technology Training program for its plant in Gretna, Virginia, and requested a second tour for the plant manager and owner. Capps produces footwear for military, law enforcement, and first responders. Also attending the tour were various DARS placement counselors, a DARS unit supervisor, and DARS Business Development Services team members. The goal of the tour was to show employers that WWRC is a modern workforce center in addition to being a Virginia Department of Education state-operated program educational facility that meets the needs of businesses using its workforce driven curriculum. Many facets of the Center were shared such as Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy wraparound supports, educational and Assistive Technology accommodations, and the obtainment of hundreds of WIOA industry-recognized credentials. Many tour participants left amazed at the level of support and services WWRC students receive to enter the modern workforce, and offered to be a part of WWRC’s Vocational Training Advisory Committees and employer forums.

Check out the Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation’s new website at csavr.org and the success stories from WWRC currently appearing on their website. Several episodes of our WWRC Foundation’s podcast is currently featured at CSAVR. Of course, you can always find a new monthly episode at vrworkforcestudio.com and the podcast is now featured on Deb Ruh’s Global Impact Today radio network.
CVS Health

WWRC has continued to grow its relationship with CVS Health who has donated an entire pharmacy setup to expand WWRC’s program. Students can train in the mock store at WWRC and transition into an internship in one of four local CVS stores. The level of support from CVS is extraordinary and company contacts are in close communication with our Business Development and Job Placement staff to monitor the job application process. CVS has now provided a Pre-pharmacy Tech training curriculum, which will be available in the spring of 2018 for students who have completed retail training through WWRC.

David Casey, CVS Vice Pres., Work Strategies and Chief Diversity Officer and Kaylee Merrick

WWRC Now a Certiport Testing Site

We are happy to announce that Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center will soon be an Authorized Testing Site for two new issuing organizations, Certiport and National Retail Federation (NRF). As a Certiport testing site we will be able to provide our Business and Information Technology students with the opportunity to acquire multiple credentials as a Microsoft Office Specialist, Expert or Master, or Microsoft Technology Associate through the Microsoft Imagine Academy. These industry-standard credentials meet the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) credentialing requirements. The Microsoft Imagine Academy is possible through a Memorandum of Understanding between disABLEDperson, Inc. brokered by the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation, and WWRC.

As a NRF testing site, all students will be given the opportunity to acquire a Customer Service and Sales credential that is also a WIOA recognized industry-standard credential. Due to WIOA, the Virginia Department of Education Profile of a 21st Century Graduate, and the fact that we fall under the Career Technical Education umbrella, WWRC is becoming even more focused on industry-standard credentials that align with Career Pathways to improve employment opportunities and outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Our goal is for every student enrolled in one of our eight training programs to leave WWRC with at least one industry-standard credential.

Job Fair With Omni Homestead Resort

As we implement the 2018 Blueprint, WIOA, and Vision 2020, and begin working with Kathy Hayfield, our new Commissioner, a key to our success is how we engage business. The first
principal of CSAVR’s Vision 2020 is to be mission driven and dual customer focused and this language is throughout our Blueprint. These principles are being embraced all across the country, and particularly here in Virginia, through Commissioner Hayfield’s leadership. As Vision 2020 suggests, we are focusing on the needs of our clients (mission driven) and the needs of business and industry, as well (dual customer focused). That is why we are so excited to announce another Job Fair with the Omni Homestead Resort. Through our Agency’s Workforce Development unit and Business Development Managers, and with the support of our local Job Placement Counselor, Penni Wetherell, we have scheduled the Omni for an on-site visit here at WWRC on March 27.

This month’s podcast interview is with two graduates from WWRC’s Materials Handling program who now work full time with benefits at the Omni. Click here to listen to their story. We were also extremely fortunate to talk with Omni’s Talent Acquisition Manager, Jennifer Lorenzo, who will be here for the Job Fair. If you would like to hear Jen’s take on Disability Employment or more information on what it’s like to work at Omni, check out Jenny’s Interview, and feel free to share these links with students who might be interested in working at Omni.
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
The Choice Group

- Independent Living Skills
- Life Skills Training
- Job Seeking Skills Training
- Vocational Assessments
- Situational Assessments
- Job Development
- Job Placement and Training
- Long Term Follow Along
- Job Coach Training Services
- Support Employment
- Placement
- Educational Services
- Individual and Group Counseling
- Therapeutic Consultation
- Career Counseling

We Help People With Disabilities Live Up To Their Abilities

The Choice Group
4807 Radford Avenue, Suite 106 • Richmond, VA 23230
(804) 278-9151 • Toll-free 877-374-5312
E-mail: info@thechoicegroup.com • www.thechoicegroup.com
At the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, most of our employees can say this at the end of each day.

We hire individuals with a variety of occupational skills: vocational rehabilitation counselors, vocational evaluators, disability determination analysts, program specialists and more.

Join us in our mission to secure independence, inclusion and integration of individuals with disabilities into our communities. Our employees truly make a difference in the lives of Virginians.

Visit [www.vadsa.org/apps/DSAJobs/Default.aspx](http://www.vadsa.org/apps/DSAJobs/Default.aspx) to learn more about careers at DARS.
# VRA Events Calendar

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

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>June 15&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>NewsNotes Deadline, Second Quarter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 15&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>NewsNotes Deadline, Third Quarter</td>
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<td>Jan 15&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>NewsNotes Deadline, Fourth Quarter</td>
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**Deadline for next issue’s NewsNotes articles is June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

Send to newsnotes@vra.org

VRA would like to hear from YOU! What would you like to see included in the NewsNotes? How do you use the NewsNotes and the information provided? What would be useful to you?

Thank you for your time in assisting us!
MEMBERSHIP
Virginia Rehabilitation Association

Training opportunities for professional development at little to no cost

Network and build connections across the state with various providers and specialists/mentors/leaders

Connect and become involved in projects that develop the mission of vocational rehabilitation

Join today! https://www.vra.org/membership/index.html


Like us on Facebook and become part of our public group to receive articles and info on upcoming events and trainings!
https://www.facebook.com/Virginia-Rehabilitation-Association-221447861231371/?ref=page_internal
NewsNotes
Virginia Rehabilitation Association.

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President-Elect  William Sutton, Jr.
Past President  Margie Millner
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Secretary  Ericka Neville
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Tiffany Jenkins
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Vera Hansley
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Angela Volkening
Tyler Schreffler

VRCEA President  Rhonda Beavers-Chandler
VARL President  Dawn Scott
NewsNotes Editor  Kate Gariepy

Next Deadline for NewsNotes: June 15th, 2018

Please Submit NewsNotes articles to
Dawn Scott by Email at:
newsnotes@vra.org  or dawn.scott@vra.org