



the Career Counselor

A publication of the Arkansas Department of Career Education
501-682-1500 • <http://ace.arkansas.gov>



90 ACTI Students Graduate to Brighter Futures

The Arkansas Career Training Institute (ACTI) recently graduated 90 students from its career-focused curriculum. Of those, 19 had already secured jobs by the time they walked across the Hot Springs Convention Center stage to receive their diplomas. Many others had strong job prospects and were eager to begin working.

ACTI offers vocational rehabilitation and career training to Arkansas adults with disabilities who meet the criteria and are referred from any of the 20 Arkansas Rehabilitation Services field offices. On average, there are 300 students enrolled at the downtown Hot Springs residential facility at any given time.

Students can pursue basic adult education goals, including attaining GED certification, at ACTI. In addition, they can choose

to specialize in the career clusters listed below. The number following each specialization indicates the number of December graduates from that area.

- Automotive Collision Repair (3)**
- Automotive Service Technology (10)**
- Business and Marketing Technology (6)**
- Certified Nursing Assistant (8)**
- Construction Technology (4)**
- Cosmetology (8)**
- Dietetics (8)**
- Graphic Communications (9)**
- Health Information Technology (7)**

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on page 8*



**Dr. Emma Rhodes with
Director Bill Walker**

COLLEAGUES THROW CHARLIE BROWN SURPRISE RETIREMENT RECEPTION

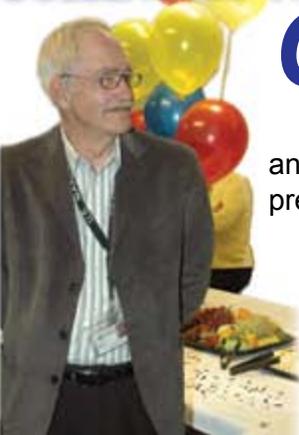
Charlie Brown retired from the Department of Career Education (ACE) January 6, 2012, after more than 22 years of service to ACE as associate director of finance and 37 total years of service to Arkansas education.

At a surprise retirement party on January 5, Brown was surrounded by co-workers, past and present, and given an eagle-topped plaque by Director Bill Walker, who expressed appreciation for Brown's dedicated service and financial expertise.

"Charlie has earned the retirement he's about to enter into, but it will be impossible to fill his shoes. On behalf of the people of this agency and this administration, we wish you the best," Walker said.

John Davidson, recent ACE retiree, said to Brown, "You appreciate the people and places of Arkansas so much, and I think you're an Arkansas treasure for what you've done for the agency and for education in Arkansas."

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Director's Update

William L. "Bill" Walker, Jr.
Director

Arkansas Department of Career Education

As the new year begins, there are several critical challenges facing the Department of Career Education. Four of the most critical involve the **Arkansas Career Training Institute (ACTI)**, **Arkansas Works**, the **secondary career centers** and the **state adult education program**. We have come to a crossroads in both these areas, and we must make wise decisions that support the mission of our agency and are in the best interests of the students and clients that we serve.

Arkansas Career Training Institute Hospital

We have determined that in order to best meet the needs of ACTI students, the current medical model will be redesigned as a clinic model that will be similar to the clinic model used by many colleges, as well as other rehabilitation facilities. We anticipate that the target date for full implementation of the new model will be six to twelve months.

Our commitment throughout the redesign process has been and will continue to be meeting federal requirements, serving our clients, protecting our valued employees, and maintaining the long-term integrity of ACTI.

The decision to redesign the medical model was reached after consultation with the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), which has directed ARS to re-evaluate resource allocation relating to ACTI and determine what services need to be retained and what services are duplicated in local communities.

The hospital has had an average daily census of only three patients

over the past few years. Despite ACTI's exceptional medical staff, we simply cannot compete with local medical facilities that provide state-of-the-art facilities and equipment in local communities.

The change to the clinic model will necessitate a reduction of 20 to 30 positions, depending upon exactly how the new medical model is designed. To minimize the impact on affected employees, the agency will absorb some of the positions through attrition; some employees will be reassigned within the agency; and others will be provided assistance in pursuing positions elsewhere in state government or the private sector.

In November, a meeting with ACTI medical staff was held to inform staff and solicit their expertise in designing the new model. I asked for the appointment of an employee-driven task force to assist in designing the new medical model. That task force contacted other facilities with similar missions to evaluate their medical models.

The task force, which was made up of Dr. Nannette Vowell, Dr. Alan Phillips, Barbara Roach, Cornelious Hollinshed, Karol Farnell, Connie Briggs and Silver Valovich, has presented its recommendations, and we are reviewing those as we redesign the model. The task force did an excellent job, and I want to personally thank each member for his or her hard work and dedication.

We anticipate that the savings from the medical model will allow ACTI to strengthen educational and training programs that lead to em-

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A public information pamphlet of the Arkansas Department of Career Education and the Arkansas Rehabilitation Services Division.

Arkansas Department of Career Education

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Department Gives \$500,000 to STEM Education Efforts

The Arkansas Department of Career Education has provided a \$500,000 grant in support of STEM Works, a project of Gov. Mike Beebe's Workforce Cabinet that aims to overhaul the ways in which Arkansas high school students receive STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering and Math - education.

The program is also designed to increase the number of well-qualified teachers in STEM areas by equipping Arkansas colleges with the tools they need to better educate future K-12 teachers in these subjects.

"As a state, we have a moral obligation to all of our students - not just the top 5 or 10 percent - to offer the STEM skills that will be required in every 21st-century career," said Arkansas Department of Career Education Director William L. "Bill" Walker, Jr. "STEM Works will expand the opportunities for more students to explore careers in STEM fields."

The hallmark of STEM education is project-based learning with a focus on STEM subjects that will help students excel in the Common Core State Standards and develop the 21st-century skills they'll need to succeed in education and training beyond high school and careers.

The Governor's Workforce Cabinet announced in January that 15 Arkansas school districts and one technical center will be the first participants in the initiative. The districts and the technical center will participate either in Project Lead the Way or the New Tech Network. The New Tech high school model integrates STEM education and extensive project-based learning throughout the curriculum. Project Lead the Way includes several introductory courses in engineering or biomedical sciences that show how basic concepts taught in the classroom are used in the work world.

Joining Project Lead the Way are Gravette, Jonesboro, Prairie Grove, Riverview, and Star City. The Northark Technical Center, which serves 14 districts in northern Arkansas, was also chosen for Project Lead the Way.

Schools adopting the New Tech model are Arkadelphia, Dumas, El Dorado, Highland, Hope, Marked Tree, Riverview (which was also chosen for Project Lead the Way), Russellville and Van Buren. Lincoln and Cross County began participating in New Tech this school year, and they were also awarded grants by the cabinet as part of STEM Works. New Tech schools will receive \$150,000 each while Lincoln and Cross County, as existing New Tech schools, will each receive \$75,000. Project Lead the Way schools will receive varying amounts up to about \$95,000, depending on their needs.

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Jim Smith, deputy director of adult education, said, "Charlie and I have worked a long time together; he's been the go-to guy around here." He said to those present, "There's not one of you that's had a question about school law or finances or how to do it without going to prison or making headlines that didn't rely on Charlie's depth of knowledge. He carries that knowledge around with him, and we're going to miss that."



(Above, left) Brown, right, gets tips from retirees John Davidson, left, and Lee Griffin, both former agency administrators. (Above right) Staff gave Brown this hat to start him on the road to retirement.



"We can get someone else to take the job, but we'll never replace the man," Smith said.

"You could ask a question and feel very comfortable with the honest answer you'd get from Charlie," said Rod Duckworth, interim director for career and technical education.

"The thing that I will always remember about Charlie is how he advocated for the students," recalled Deborah Germany, deputy director for agency communications.

"He fought for student loan forgiveness, for the technical scholarships and more."

After the accolades from his peers, Brown reluctantly took the

floor.

"I'm not one to make speeches, and I definitely try to avoid situations where attention is drawn to me, but...the biggest thing we've tried to draw attention to over the years are the people we serve," he said.

"What we focused on, and what I encourage all of you to do who are in the agency now, is to remember we work for the people. If it wasn't for those folks out there that we have the privilege of working for and serving, we wouldn't have a job."

Brown concluded, "I've always felt that our agency's services are of the highest order, and it's been a privilege. I'm going to miss you, but

I'll be around. Thank you all."

Charlie Brown is a native Arkansan and held positions in education for 37 years. He began teaching in the Cushman School District. Later he became principal of the high school and superintendent of the former Desha School District in Independence County. Brown graduated from Arkansas College (now Lyon College) with majors in business administration and social studies. He also holds a master's degree from Arkansas State University in Jonesboro.

Brown and his wife, Janie, have two children, Natasha and Patrick, and two granddaughters, Taylor and Tristan.

At the December state Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy™ (WAGE) Advisory Committee meeting in Little Rock, Melissa Featherston of the Pulaski County Adult Education presented Mike Chandler, vice president and general manager of the Crosby National Swage plant in Jacksonville, with an appreciation award.

"Mr. Chandler has been the chairperson of the Pulaski County WAGE Advisory Committee for many years and continues in the role," Featherston said. "He is also an important advocate for the WAGE program itself, having realized first-hand the difference it can make for workers – and for companies."

"The Pulaski County WAGE program has ongoing workplace classes at Mike's plant," said Ralph Edds, state WAGE coordinator. "He saw the importance of offering classes there onsite and even pays his employees while they take the classes."

The WAGE Advisory Committee meets quarterly and consists of representatives from each WAGE program in Arkansas.



Melissa Featherston and Mike Chandler

CORNER

"Assistive Technology 4 Life"



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Finally, extra support for getting in or out of cars, SUVs, vans and light trucks.

The device inserts into the existing U-shaped door striker on the vehicle door frame. A non-slip handle locks into position, creating a safe support on either the driver or passenger door. The device supports up to 350 pounds and fits 99.5 percent of vehicles in use in the United States

It is an amazing, multifunctional accessory that improves mobility, independence and security for drivers and passengers. A stainless steel bar with soft, non-slip hand grip slides into car door latches to provide a strong, secure assist in getting in and out of a car. It also acts as a grab bar without need for costly adaptations. The device weighs 13 ounces and is 9¼ inches long.



Features:

- ✓ Promotes safety, mobility; protects against falls and makes standing or sitting easy
- ✓ Universal-secure fit into passenger or driver side door latch
- ✓ No-slip ergonomic grip fits parallel to car for comfortable grip and optimal leverage
- ✓ Self-locking locator fits in space where car door latches
- ✓ Soft non-slip handle
- ✓ Strong forged steel construction
- ✓ No installation necessary; easy to use
- ✓ Features built-in seat belt cutter and side window breaker for your emergency needs. Item Number #69047

School-based Businesses Offer Students Valuable Work Experience

The student organization DECA prepares emerging leaders for careers in marketing, finance, hospitality, entrepreneurship and management.

In Alma students operate "Aire-looms" (right) a spirit shop that sells mascot-themed items in support of the Alma Airedales. Profits are reinvested back into the business and also used to fund DECA conference and competition participation.

Harrison students operate the "DECA's House of Grounds" coffee shop (far right), which sells national-chain quality coffee drinks, smoothies and teas. Profits are used to award college scholarships to student workers.

Both stores are open limited hours during the school day and to the public during many after-hours sporting events.

In December, the marketing students and teacher at Northside High School in Fort Smith opened "Grizzly Gear," a student-managed gift and apparel store located in the school's former bookstore. Northside joins Alma and Harrison high schools as the only school-based businesses in the state.



DECA chapters learn marketing skills at Harrison (above) and Alma.

ACE Employees Gathered for 2011 Staff Meeting

Division program reports were given by Sherry Brown and Bridget Bullard, program advisors for the Adult Education Division; Dave Fisher, program advisor for the Career and Technical Education Division; and Dr. Adrienne Robinson, for Arkansas Rehabilitation Services.

Pam Harris, human resources administrator, presented information on the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and Father Rick Ward-Harder, chaplain and program manager for student living at the Arkansas Career Training Institute (ACTI), offered training on professionalism and motivation.

The following employees received Director's Awards from Director Bill Walker:

- **Tim Hicks**
- **Jeff Jackson**
- **Marva Dansby**
- **Father Rick Ward-Harder**
- **Carl Daughtery**
- **Rodney Chandler**
- **Laurel Carnes** (retired)

Director Walker also recognized **Randy Parker**, ARS associate director for program, planning, development and evaluation, and **Judy Smith**, ARS transition director, for their continuing dedication in serving the citizens of the state.

ARS Chief of Field Services Carl Daughtery distributed awards to the following:

- **Catherine Thomas**, Fayetteville - Ken Musteen Counselor of the Year Award
- **District IX** / Marva Dansby - Top-Producing District
- **District I** / Carol Ethridge - 2nd Top-Producing District
- **District X** / Sterling Hughes - 3rd Top-Producing District



SMT members were again persuaded to put their vocal talents to the test.



Director's Award winner Tim Hicks with Director Walker (left) and Rod Duckworth (right)



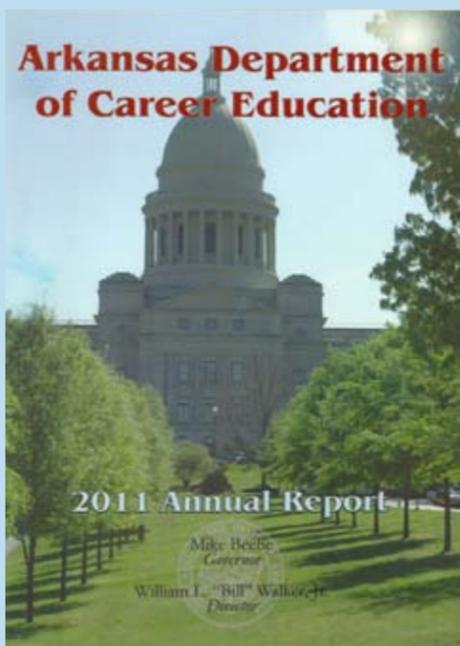
Counselor of the Year Catherine Thomas (center) with (l-r) Adrienne Robinson, Carl Daughtery, Commissioner Treviño and Director Walker



Retiring Charlie Brown (left) and retiree Laurel Carnes share future plans as Director Walker presents Carnes with a Director's Award



Top-producing District IX award was accepted by District Manager Marva Dansby



The agency's 2011 Annual Report was distributed during the December staff meeting. To request a copy of this booklet, contact the Communications Department at 501-682-1701 or email ellice.scales@arkansas.gov

Spotlight on Cynthia Veal & Kristy Fincel



Kristy Fincel

Others are there seeking job training, education and career skills in light of a physical or cognitive disability. But for two students, the opportunity to live and study at ACTI might have actually saved their lives. Cynthia Veal and Kristy Fincel each came to ACTI straight from battered women's shelters.

Formerly Battered Women Find Hope and Careers Through ACTI

Many of the 300 students who reside and learn at the Arkansas Career Training Institute (ACTI) in Hot Springs find their way there following an injury or illness that makes them eligible for vocational rehabilitation.

Cynthia Veal

Cynthia Veal grew up in Lincoln, Ark., where she says she "was in private school my whole life." Veal got pregnant at 18 and married her high school sweetheart; they had four children. In 2003, her husband died following a massive heart attack, after which Veal remembers, "I had a nervous breakdown and signed over custody of my kids to my brother," whose family already included three children.

After that, Veal said she got into a relationship with a man who was abusive. She had been in that relationship for a year and a half when, in September 2010, she recalls, "It finally came to a head, and I was rushed to the emergency room."

"\$10,000 in medical services and seven hours later, I was placed in protective custody in a battered women's shelter," Veal said. She was there for four months.

"It was my choice to go. 'Protective custody' meant it was a gated shelter; they had security systems, cameras everywhere, police on duty and lockdown."

When asked if she felt safe there, Veal replied, "Yes, but it took a while before I felt safe anywhere." Actually, her deceased husband had been abusive as well.

In October 2010, in the midst of a fun "ladies night" party at the shelter, Veal slipped off an ottoman and broke her ankle in three places. Again she was rushed

to the hospital, where her ankle was repaired with a metal plate and three screws.

"At least I can say this time I broke it myself, and I broke it having fun," Veal said. But the severity of the break, even after healing, meant she could no longer work in the career in which she had experience.

"My job had been in food service at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville," Veal explained. "With the break, I couldn't stand on my feet for eight hours anymore."

She was referred to the Fayetteville office of the Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) Division, where she was tested and determined to be eligible for vocational rehabilitation. Veal's counselor gave her the choice of receiving local vocational counseling through the Fayetteville ARS office or moving to Hot Springs and enrolling in ACTI.

"I had an abuser in the [Fayetteville] area that I really didn't want to run into," recalls Veal. "So I chose ACTI for a change of scenery and a fresh start."

Veal enrolled at ACTI in June 2011. After completing the mandatory three-week career orientation class, she met the qualifications to study the field of her choice--sales and marketing.

When asked why she didn't instead pursue the dietetics route given her experience in food service and preparation, she replied, "I already know a lot of that. I'd like to study sales and marketing so I can move into the catering, planning and sales side of the food business. Besides, I can't stay on my feet that long anymore."

She seems to have chosen a career path that suits her. "I made As on my first three tests," Veal proudly reported.

But despite her academic success, living and studying at the co-ed ACTI has been an adjustment. She recounts life at the Fayetteville women's shelter: "When an electrician or serviceman came to do work



Cynthia Veal

ACTI Happenings

GRADS continued from page 1

- Lodging and Guest Services (6)
- Power Equipment Technology and Grounds Keeping (10)
- Sales and Marketing (7)
- Special Programs (1)
- Welding (3)

The graduation ceremony included all the elements of a traditional affair, including students in caps and gowns marching down the aisle to the tune of "Pomp and Circumstance." Dignitaries from ACTI's governing agency, the Arkansas Department of Career Education (ACE) and Rehabilitation Services (ARS) Division, encouraged the graduates to be empowered by their accomplishments. ACE Director Bill Walker enthusiastically urged graduates to pursue their dreams, while ARS Commissioner Bob Treviño expressed his pride in how well the students will represent ACTI in their communities.

The guest speaker was Dr. Emma Kelly Rhodes, who is a veteran Arkansas educator and the former GED state administrator for ACE's Adult

Education Division. Dr. Rhodes offered graduates tips for career success based on her experiences. She was among those who congratulated the graduates as they received their diplomas, which for many include state and national certifications in their chosen fields. The graduation ceremony ended as most do, with the turning of the tassel and caps flying high.

The list of graduates, their home towns and any special designations follows.

Automotive Collision Repair Instructors - Donald Crossley & David Tunniff Brandon Kesner ● ●, Rogers; Justin Reed, Tucker; Robert Russell, Ft. Smith. **Automotive Service Technology Instructors - Phil Crume, & Wayne Thomas** Charles Baker, Little Rock; Efre Brown ●, Fordyce; Travis Collins, Vilonia; Dalton Duvall ●, Pelsor; Chris Green ● ●, Batesville; Javarious Harrison, North Little Rock; Michael King, Imboden; James Parker ●, Sheridan; Derrick Pennington, Dumas; Michael Wallace ●, Emerson. **Business & Marketing Technology Instructor- Sandra Dunn** Rebekah Burnett ● ● ●, West Fork; Paul Hunter ●, Hot Springs; Michael Mann ●, Hot Springs Village; Jeff Rowell ● ●, Fayetteville; Markell Scott ● ● ●, Brinkley; Jennifer Tighe ● ● ●; McCaskill. **Certified Nursing Assistant Instructor- Sharyn Spiva** Gabrielle Booker, Jonesboro; Charles Davis Jr., Marion; Cyntrell Fields, El Dorado; Justin Lee Swboni ●

●, Fayetteville; Jhanna Ahuna-Tisdale ●, Midway; Natasha Toudouze ● ●, Centerton; Elizabeth Watson, Maumelle; Market Whitfield, Pine Bluff. **Construction Technology Instructors- Nick Avery & David Morrow** Wes Gage, Jonesboro; Antonio Gardner ● ●, Pine Bluff; Jason Guffey ● ●, Perryville; Nick Murphy ● ●, Ft. Smith. **Cosmetology Instructors-Susan Gordon & Chrystal Nelson** Paula Jenkins ● ●, Bryant; Ashley Jones, Searcy; Caroline Pennington, Hot Springs Village; Dixie Phillips, Texarkana; Beau Prater ●, Danville; Victoria Price ●, Hot Springs; Sherrell Stine ●, Pearcy; Freddie Wilson ● ● ●, North Little Rock. **Dietetics Instructor- Curtis Faulkner** Mary Griffin, Bradford; Charles Jackson, Winslow; Calvin McGee ●, Lonoke; Mistie Norton, Bentonville; Madison Smith, Alexander; Kaila Storey, Junction City; Kellie Wilson, Sheridan; Timothy Zito, Prairie Grove. **Graphic Communications Instructors- Ralph Forbes, Tom Kennedy, & Larry Ward** Ronnie Bell, Earl; Carmen Collins, Kingsland; Mason Cook ●, North Little Rock; Ricky Davis, Warren; Antoinette Gaines, Rison; Charlie Graves ●, Hot Springs; Autumn Judware ● ●, Rison; Porchia Ollison, Malvern; Jimmy Winters ● ● ●, Hector. **Health Informatics Instructor- Sequoia Ferguson-Tucker** Bojak Cates ●, El Dorado; Christie Clayborn ● ●, Blytheville; Allison Farmer ● ● ●, El Dorado; Barbra Flores ● ● ●, Hot Springs; Mable Hanes ● ● ●, Little Rock; Kristy Hobson ● ● ●, Ft. Smith; Joseph Landrum ● ● ●, Lonoke. **Lodging & Guest Services Instructors- Janice McMahon, & Joetta Phillips** Melvin Bowman, Mansfield; Lashenia Gray, Strong; Quashenia Gray, Strong; Trivia Mullins., North Little Rock; Tiffany Spearman ●, Siloam Springs; Erin Underhill ●, Winslow. **Power Equipment Technology Instructor- Gary Johnston** Jacob Bennett, Walnut Ridge; Christopher Buazard, Benton; Sam Crone, Hot Springs Village; Stuart Currie ● ● ●, Hot Springs; Logan Freeman ●, Delight; Joshua Goodwin ●, Springdale; Justin Jones ●, Taylor; Tyler Lancaster ● ●, Bryant; Anthony Tasler, Van Buren; Matt Wolfe, El Dorado. **Sales & Marketing Instructor- Jacob Bryant** Rance Chism ● ●, Bauxite; Major Coleman III ● ● ●, North Little Rock; Eric Crull ● ● ●, Mountain Home; Jonathon Hunter ●, Camden; Joshua McGuire ● ●, Farmington; Joel Schmidt ● ● ●, Rogers; Cynthia Veal ● ● ●, Lincoln. **Special Programs Abilities Unlimited** Kevin Ward, West Helena; **Welding Instructor- Dennis Pickering** Ryheem Brown ●, Hot Springs; Josh Evanoff ●, North Little Rock; Chris Howe ●, Mountainburg.

Student Distinctions:
 ● Gold Sash - Honor Graduate
 ● White Sash - Skills USA Graduate
 ● Medal - Jag Graduate
 ● CRC Graduate
 ● Hosa



photo courtesy of Bobby Jines



What You Should Know

Supported Housing Office (SHO)
 Jeanette Davies
 Program Manager

Universal Design Housing Works

For longer than most of us have been around, homes throughout our country were designed and built for the "average" adult, defined as a young, six-foot-tall, able-bodied American male. That's all well and good, except it is not applicable to most families today. What about the millions of men, women, and children who are taller, shorter, heavier? What about those with physical disabilities, developmental disabilities or intellectual disabilities, as well as people with medical issues, vision, auditory impairments, etc? Universal design housing is the solution, especially since a universal design home is not noticeably different from a typical home and fits beautifully into any neighborhood.

Universal design simply means designing homes, buildings and products to be usable by the greatest number of people. It is based on the premise that disability is not a special condition of a few, as many of us deal with a temporary and/or permanent disability over the course of our lives. That given, it would follow that if disability were more commonly recognized and/or expected, universal design homes would be the rule rather than the exception.

Fortunately for Arkansans, the leadership of the

Arkansas Development Finance Authority (ADFA), our state housing agency, adopted and began implementation of select Arkansas Usability Standards in Housing (AUSH) a few years ago, resulting in the production of hundreds of units of single-family and multi-family housing throughout the state every year. The AUSH addresses five levels of housing design, ranging from visitable to livable and all-inclusive. Additional monikers for universal design housing include adaptable housing, easy living housing and accessible housing. In any case, "universal design" housing accommodates family members and visitors, ranging from the young to the elderly and including, but not limited to, persons with physical, mental, developmental, visual, auditory or other challenges.

In a nutshell, homes that incorporate basic universal design features enhance the lives of all people. Smart planning will continue to yield dividends for years to come, as our fellow Arkansans enjoy usable homes that put out the welcome mat to friends and family. For more information on universal design housing, please contact Jeanette Davies at jeanette.davies@arkansas.gov.

Correction

In September's Career Counselor article "What a Difference a Van Can Make," we inadvertently used the phrase "wheelchair-bound" to describe the subject of the profile, Michael Gordon, instead of depicting Michael as one who "uses a wheelchair," as is appropriate People-First language. We sincerely apologize for this oversight.

Senior Management Team

SMT Update

Sonja Wright-McMurray
Associate Director
for Arkansas Works
Arkansas Department
of Career Education



The Arkansas Works Program Is Working for Students

For the past year and a half, the Arkansas Works program has served students in 21 counties by providing college and career planning assistance. The program has three components: dedicated career coaches, an on-line college and career planning tool (Kuder) and ACT academies. It is designed to complement and enhance the efforts of existing school districts, postsecondary institutions and adult learning centers, and I am proud to be the program's director.

The Arkansas Works program began in 2010 with 43 career coaches who targeted 59 school districts from a home base of 12 two-year colleges. We have now increased the number of career coaches to 49.

In a short period of time, the program has produced significant results. The college-going rate has increased from 33.10 percent to 51.53 percent in those counties, including an increase in Hispanic

students enrolling in college. Of the students who participated in ACT academies, a free program that provides 24 hours of intense instruction and practice testing, 74 percent increased their scores by at least one point, and 46 percent increased at least one of their subject scores in English, math and/or reading enough to avoid a remediation requirement in college. One student's score on the reading component of the ACT test went from 16 to 25 following academy participation.

When Arkansas Works began in 2010, our initial goal for the ACT academies was to serve 700 students during the academic year and 700 students during the summer months. We have nearly reached that goal by serving up to 650 students in each session. Our career coaches, along with well-qualified instructors, have conducted 24 ACT academies each year – in the school months and in the summer. More students than ever in those



counties have accessed the Kuder online college and career planning tool.

Our program, through dedicated career coaches, has made a significant impact – but we have honestly just scratched the surface of what there is to be done. Unfortunately, our career coach program will not be funded after June 30, 2012, unless we are successful in finding another funding source. Currently, 97 percent of the funding comes from the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds, and 3 percent comes from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

State representatives Andy Mayberry and David Branscum sponsored a bill in the last session aiming to secure state-funded support. The result was instead a request for an interim study to gather additional information on the program's impact. We presented our results to the Joint Education Committee on February 6 and hope to gain more support as we seek state funding in the future. We are also searching for a grant elsewhere that would bridge our program until permanent funding can be found. For the sake of our state's students and their futures, I hope we are successful.



Students from Hall, McClellan and J.A. Fair high schools work in study groups the night before taking the December 10 ACT test. In all, 45 kids attended evening classes through a four-week condensed ACT Academy offered at the Whetstone Boys and Girls Club in Little Rock.

Arkansas JAG Students Earn State and National Recognition

Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) is a state-based national non-profit organization dedicated to preventing dropouts among young people who are most at risk. Jobs for Arkansas's Graduates is the Arkansas affiliate of the national JAG organization.

Students and sponsors who attended the Arkansas JAG conference in October joined together to focus on the importance of employability skills in preparing the students for their future. The conference also hosted competitions in the areas of employability skills, cover design and public speaking. Winning first place in each category were:

- ✓ **Aaron Waters**, McClellan High School, Little Rock- Employability Skills
- ✓ **Destiney Mc Reynold**, Northside High School, Fort Smith - Public Speaking



Scribner (left) and Nguyen

- ✓ **Huy Nguyen**, Northside High School, Fort Smith - Cover Design
- In November, the state's first-, second- and third-place winners, 20 students in all, attended the national JAG conference in Washington D.C. and competed against students from around the country. Three of the Arkansas JAG students finished with high honors:
- ✓ **Huy Nguyen**, Fort Smith High School (North Side) – first place in Cover Design
 - ✓ **Clifford Haney**, North Little Rock School (West), second place in Employability Skills
 - ✓ **Nathaniel James Scribner**, from Lamar High School, third place in Cover Design.



Haney

Nearly 100 students and administrators accompanied the state's national competitors, including Governor Beebe, who is the vice-chair of the national JAG board.

Zoo Keeper for a Day



Melanie McCann is like many who visit Little Rock's zoo. She loves animals and enjoys learning about them. But McCann, unlike most zoo visitors, got a rare opportunity to see the behind-the-scenes operation of the zoo thanks to the annual mentoring day program organized by the Arkansas Governor's Commission on People with Disabilities. Each year, Arkansans with disabilities apply to the commission in hopes of being paired with a mentor to learn more about a job of their choosing. For McCann, who has epilepsy, spending a day at the zoo learning about the animals' care and getting to interact with them first-hand was a dream come true. In her thank-you letter to Leonard Boyle, executive director of the commission, McCann said, "I got to feed one of the giraffes, I mean he ate from my hand! His name was B.J."

Boyle says McCann has a special ability to connect with animals. He calls her the "Dr. Dolittle of the disability community."

To learn more about mentoring day, contact Boyle at 501-296-1637 or leonard.boyle@arkansas.gov.

Arkansas Disability Awareness Day Celebrated

The Arkansas Disability Awareness Day celebration was held at the rotunda of the State Capitol October 19. Wanda Horton, executive director of the Arkansas Disability Coalition, served as emcee for the event. Sericia Cole, director of external affairs for Gov. Mike Beebe, read the 2011 proclamation and brought greetings on behalf of the governor.

Musical entertainment was provided by "The Overcomers" choir from Central Baptist Church in Jonesboro. Rocky Hammond and state Sen. Jason Rapert played a duo of "Amazing Grace" on their violins. In addition to being a musician, Hammond has refused to let a disability stand in the way of successful employment.

Several others with disabilities shared their inspirational success stories including **Leonard Boyle**, executive director of the Governor's Commission on People with Disabilities.

Rodney Chandler and **Ashley Cross** of the Arkansas Rehabilitation Services Division's business relations team presented awards to representatives from Arkansas businesses **Tyson Foods**, **J.B. Hunt** and **Wal-Mart/Sam's Club**. These corporations were recognized for their employment practices regarding hiring persons with disabilities. Tyson recently became the first Arkansas-based company to join the National Employment Team (The NET) through the Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation. The NET brings together 80 public vocational rehabilitation

programs across the country to operate as a single unit when working with businesses or corporations who are seeking to employ persons with disabilities.



ACE Director Bill Walker (left) and Rodney Chandler (second from left) present a certificate of appreciation and framed disability awareness poster to Ryan Penner of Tyson Foods (center) recognizing Tyson's commitment to hiring people with disabilities. Ashley Cross and ARS Commissioner Robert Treviño (right) look on.

We're making plans for the 2012

Youth Leadership Forum

June 25 - 29 * University of Central Arkansas in Conway

YLF is a week-long opportunity for students 16, 17 and 18 years old with disabilities to learn what they need to know in life-skills, such as Transition to Secondary School/Time Management * Independent Living Skills * Nutrition and Medications * Disability Rights * Leadership & Diplomacy * Values & Diversity * How to apply for and get a job * Responsibilities of Having a Job * College Living Experience



How to Apply

ARS Counselors in each district office will have the application forms you need to apply and can answer your questions. Or go to our website (www.ace.arkansas.gov) to learn more and download an application under ARS/Special Programs/Governor's Commission on People with Disabilities/YLF.



Rocky Hammond, left, plays Amazing Grace alongside Sen. Jason Rapert, right, as a benediction to the Arkansas Disability Awareness Day celebration in the rotunda of the State Capitol.

TRAINING LEADERS FOR SUCCESS



Arkansas SkillsUSA has completed four fall leadership conferences for secondary and post-secondary students. More than 400 secondary students and 40 postsecondary students participated in leadership sessions that included communications, etiquette, team-building and officer essential materials to prepare these young minds for leadership in the world of work.

Each student went through each session with counterparts from other schools to learn how they handle and display their leadership attributes at their schools. SkillsUSA Advisory Board members and other advisors assisted in presenting these sessions at the various locations: University of Arkansas at Fort Smith, East Arkansas Community College in Forrest City, Pulaski Technical College in North Little Rock, and the Clarion Hotel in Hot Springs.

At the end of the sessions, students took a written test to earn the Arkansas SkillsUSA Statesman Award. Students earning the Statesman Awards were **Kayla Buffington**, **Carla Wilkins** and **KeNyada Smith**, Metropolitan Career and Technical Center, Little Rock; **Eunice Calhoun**, Conway High School; **Kristen Ferrance**, Career Academy of Hair Design-Springdale; **Angela Glasglow**, Sylvan Hills High School, North Little Rock; **Marissa Harris**, North Little Rock High School West; **Brittney Harvey**, **Brad Horn** and **Alice Lovellette**,

Kaleah Hegwood, **Summer Hornaday**, **Nacanya Hogan** and **Angelica Robles**, Southern Arkansas University Tech Career Academy, Camden; **Daniel A. Hernandez**, **Michelle Hunt**, **Macey Morgan**, **Trang Nguyen** and **Maria A. Sandoval**, Arkansas Tech University Career Center, Russellville; **Brandon Menard**, **Bradley Menard**, **Kevin Pickens**, **Lance Watson** and **Randle Potts**, Texarkana Area Vocational Center; **Tuesday Parker**, Waldron High School; **Maira Perez** and **Laura Worthen**, Springdale High School; **Chesney Skaggs** and **Lauren Thimm**, Greenland High School; **Sergio Sonora**, Rogers High School; **Staci McCollough**, Arkansas Career Training Institute, Hot Springs.

Film Festival Sprouts Educational Arts Festival Aimed at Local Students

In conjunction with the 2nd Annual Offshoot Film Festival, Trent Jones, television production instructor at Springdale's Har-Ber High School, organized an Educational Arts Festival in Fayetteville on October 27. The event attracted 242 high school and postsecondary students from the region who took part in educational sessions covering topics such as graphic design, photography, photojournalism, filmmaking, animation, story writing and video production. The event also featured screenings of student-submitted videos, films, documentaries, animations, shorts, news features and public service announcements.

"I've been trying to tear down the imaginary divisions between film, media, multi-media, news media and television because in the real world, all those disciplines are combined," Jones said. "Our students need to be exposed to all these disciplines, so I envisioned this multidisciplinary educational film festival, and it's been really well received."

Jones also organized a leadership luncheon that day at which 36 representatives from the film, news and television industries and education and state government networked and were encouraged to, per Jones, "discuss what we're all doing to help prepare students for jobs and to help create jobs for them."



ABOVE: Trent Jones, film production instructor at Springdale Har-Ber High School, welcomes participants to the leadership luncheon during the Offshoot Film Festival's Educational Arts Conference.



ABOVE: Festival attendees try their hand at television interviewing and reporting in front of a "green screen" at the booth sponsored by NewTek, a video production equipment company.

FFA at the Arkansas State Fair



October 14 - 23, 2011

FFA Introduces New Technology

Arkansas FFA incorporated QR (quick response) codes into its annual "Ag in Action" displays at the Arkansas State Fair. When the codes were scanned by smart phones using a free application, users were immediately shown an informative video showing the animal and student handler.



The Monsanto Corporation presented the FFA Foundation with a \$2,000 check on October 14. The donation is through the America's Farmers Grow Communities project. Monsanto representative Richie Workman (far right) presents the check to Marion Fletcher, ACE program coordinator for agricultural science and technology and state FFA advisor (far left), and FFA members from the Guy-Perkins FFA chapter.



This dairy goat wants everyone to see his video through the QR code posted on his cage.

CAREER EXPLORATION STUDENTS COMPETE IN POSTER CONTEST

The Arkansas Career Guidance Association (ACGA), in partnership with the ACE Career Guidance, Exploration and Preparation office, sponsors an annual student poster contest with cash prizes awarded to the top 10 finishers.

Each semester, seventh- and eighth-grade students in career orientation classes across the state are encouraged to create posters with images and information about careers that interest them. The posters are judged at the school level, with the top one or two posters sent

to the ACE office for state-level judging. Dede Crowder is responsible for managing the poster contest each year – a big job.

The fall semester completion at-



tracted 56 entries that were judged by agency employees Ray Henson, Bruce Lazarus, Karie Smith, Dave Fisher and Barbara Lensing.

Only students of teachers who are active members of ACGA are eligible to enter the contest. Prize money is provided by the association: \$30 for 1st place, \$20 for 2nd place, \$15 for 3rd place. The remaining seven winners are awarded \$10 each.

See adjacent page for a list of winners.

CTE Leadership Institute Commences Second Round of Classes

The second Arkansas Career and Technical Education Leadership Institute kicked off its first session January 19-20 in Little Rock with 26 participants from across the state.

The institute is designed for educators who aspire to become leaders on the local, district, state and regional levels; who want to broaden their knowledge of leadership theories and principles; and who would like to develop more effective supervisory and managerial skills.

This institute is directed by ACE's Office of School Improvement. Individuals selected to participate in the institute attend eight two-day leadership sessions, one each quarter, including the Arkansas Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Conference.

"The institute was established in 2009 to address an expected shortage of CTE administrators due to the number of current administrators expected to retire over the next several years," said Bruce Lazarus, program coordinator for the Office of School Improvement. "The institute focus on creating a holistic understanding of career and technical education that is essential for our future CTE leaders."

Costs for participants—including registration, meals, lodging, travel and substitute pay (if required)—is reimbursed to the participants' schools through federal Perkins funds.



Members of the leadership class are Michelle Abernathy, Mount Ida High School; Kimberly Alexander, Umpire High School; Kim Bayliss, Star City High School; Christine Bennett, Bryant High School; Lynette Bowman, Blytheville High School; Tina Boyles, Forrest City High School; Jeri Breashears, Caddo Hills High School; Ronnie K. Erwin, Newport High School; Mickey Ford, Kirby High School; Brenda Foster, St. Paul School; Heath Hawkins, Manila High School; Cheryl Henriques, West Memphis High School; Dorothy House, Metropolitan Career Center, Little Rock; Scott Howie, Northark Technical Center, Harrison; Jason Hudnell, National Park Technology Center, Hot Springs; Glenda Kassaw, Caddo Hills High School; Brittany Lawrence, Weiner High School; Dexter Lee, Dumas High School; Sherri May, Mount Ida; Tammy McCollum, Conway School District; Cheryl Pickering, Northwest Arkansas Education Service Cooperative, Springdale; Shantele Raper, Osceola School District; Melissa Rice, Hoxie High School; Kaci Travis, South Arkansas Community College, El Dorado; Carla Wilkins, Metropolitan Career Center, Little Rock; and Casey Wilson, South Arkansas Community College, El Dorado.

Fall 2011 Career Exploration Poster Contest Winners

PLACE	STUDENT	SCHOOL	TEACHER
1st	Matthew Annis	Russellville Jr. High	Sandy Hocker
2nd	Tori Popham	Carl Stuart Middle, Conway	Tammy McCollum
3rd	River Brooks	Coleman Jr. High, Van Buren	Linda King
4th	Erin Siems	Stuttgart Jr. High	Donna Chadick
5th	Victoria Burnett	Sheridan Middle	Robin Todd
6th	Aubrey Millie	Lake Hamilton Jr. High	Carolyn Woodyard
7th	Emily Fang	Russellville Jr. High	Sandy Hocker
8th	Brenna Arnold	Ahlf Jr. High, Searcy	Kristie Morrison
9th	Micah Mitchell	Stuttgart Jr. High	Donna Chadick
10th	Brittany Schmidt	White County Central	Milinda King

ACTI Campus Greenhouse

Funded by \$10,000 Lowe's and SkillsUSA Grant

On November 14, when ACE Director Bill Walker cut the ribbon and officially opened the new greenhouse at the Arkansas Career Training Institute (ACTI), it was the culmination of 12 months of planning and the beginning of a new chapter in career education at ACTI.

ACTI was the recipient of a \$10,000 funded by a joint program through Lowe's and SkillsUSA. The grant paid for the materials and plans – but the installation was up to the instructors and students.

One of the goals, according to Dr. Dawn Simpson, ACTI's director of vocational training, was "to offer students hands-on learning through all phases of the project."

Before any building started, the construction technology students cleared the site, learned to build concrete forms and to pour and finish concrete.

When it came time to build the greenhouse, the process put the students' and the teachers' skills to the test.

"The greenhouse materials did not come pre-cut. Our students learned how to cut and measure sheet metal and polycarbonate glass," said Nick Avery, construction technology instructor.



Left side of photo: Lowe's' Doug Medlock (in sunglasses) and Jeanie Palmer join Commissioner Treviño in the ribbon-cutting. Right side of photo (l-r): Director Bill Walker, Dr. Dawn Simpson, ACTI Administrator Jonathan Bibb, and students Jason Guffey and Justin Edwards help out.

Part of the long-range plan for the greenhouse is for students studying grounds-keeping to use plants grown in the greenhouse for campus landscaping.

"This greenhouse will give us a chance to have new plants to add to the landscape," said Gary Johnston, power technology and grounds-keeping instructor. "We're looking forward to the greenhouse providing new learning opportunities for our students."

The SkillsUSA chapter at ACTI is in its third year. The greenhouse project has provided a rallying point for the members and a new-member recruiting tool.

Wayne Thomas, chapter sponsor, said, "All the different areas within SkillsUSA have been brought together through this project. It's really given the students a sense of purpose and focus."

"The students who worked on the project, when they graduate and leave, they can come back and say, 'I helped build this greenhouse,'" added Ralph Forbes, graphic communications instructor. His students took photos throughout construction and will use them in future documentation of the project.



Left to right front row: Richard Tanner, Jeremy Gable, Justin Edwards, Cory Blackmon, Nick Murphy, Jason Guffey, Rebecca Connor, Dr. Simpson, Taylor Archer, Alan Julien and from Lowe's, Jeanie Palmer and Doug Medlock; Second row: Instructors David Morrow and Nick Avery, students Roman Williams, Jacob Reed, Michael Popejoy, Wes gage, Antonio Gardner, Marco Paladax, Adam Thomas, Zach Gartner, Dexter Taylor and Rhine Lackie.

DIRECTOR continued from page 2

ployment of ARS clients and further will put resources back into the local communities for the purpose of making medical services available locally.

Arkansas Works

Thanks to Arkansas Works, students in 21 economically disadvantaged counties are now "seeing what they can be." Students who once thought high school graduation was the end of the line are now aspiring to meaningful careers, and preparing for those careers through postsecondary education, apprenticeships, the military, and other avenues.

We are encouraged by the remarkable early successes of Arkansas Works and are confident that by continuing this initiative, we can help the state of Arkansas and its citizens become the best educated and trained workforce.

Unfortunately, however, funding for Arkansas Works will come to an end on June 30, 2012, unless another source of funding can be found.

It is our hope that we can secure a bridge grant to sustain the program for one year until June 30, 2013. A bridge grant would allow us to continue the program while we are seeking a stable source of funding to allow us to continue the program beyond June 30, 2013, and to expand the career coach component in all 75 Arkansas counties.

For more information on Arkansas Works and the funding issue that we are facing, see the article by Sonja Wright-McMurray, associate director for Arkansas Works, on page 10 of this newsletter.

Secondary Career Centers

Secondary technical centers are designed to offer career and technical education (CTE) programs that are high-demand, high-skill and high-wage to high school students within a defined geographical region. High schools, education service cooperatives, or two-year colleges can spon-

sor a secondary career centers.

Currently, there are 68 high schools across the state that do not have access to a career center. Additional funding is needed so that we can address this inequity by establishing eight new centers. Funding is also needed so that existing centers can expand course offerings and meet increased enrollment demands.

In addition to requesting an increase in funding, we are pursuing a change to our policies and procedures that would provide better utilization of funds. For centers and satellites in which the percentage of students from one high school is over 60 percent, we propose to designate the eligible full-time equivalent (FTE) count for center funding and pass-through funding to the high schools to 60 percent of the FTE count with the local school contributing from local funds for the remaining FTE count over 60 percent. If this change is implemented, host high schools whose students comprise 60 percent or more of the FTE will bear some of the cost of the centers' programs.

Adult Education

For years, adult education teachers and administrators have managed to do more with less, as the saying goes. However, we are now facing a perfect storm of new federal regulations, a funding level that has not increased in 20 years, growing inconsistency among programs in delivery of services and a lack of accessibility to those Arkansans who need our services most.

New Federal Regulations

On July 1, 2012, the U. S. Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) will implement a revised reporting system that will change the way states report student attainment on the National Reporting System (NRS) follow-up measures. We anticipate that these changes will significantly impact the funding of some

programs. With the change, student goals will now be set automatically as follows:

- ✎ **Adults who do not have a GED credential will be counted in the cohort seeking to earn a GED.**
- ✎ **Adults eligible for the workforce who enter adult education while unemployed will be counted in the cohort seeking employment.**
- ✎ **Adults who enter adult education classes with no postsecondary education credentials will be counted in the cohort seeking postsecondary education.**

Under the new policy, some programs may receive more funding while others may see their funding decrease if students fail to attain the NRS goals.

Another federal mandate with major financial impact is the new computer-based **General Education Development (GED) Tests** slated for implementation January 1, 2014. The cost will be \$24 for each part of the test, meaning that the complete test battery will cost \$120. We know that a \$120 charge would be cost-prohibitive to many adults already suffering the effects of unemployment or underemployment. In order to help this most vulnerable population, we are searching for ways to pay some or all of the cost.

Lack of Funding

Adult education has not received any funding increase in 20 years, although the costs of providing quality programs have continued to rise. Despite the fact that we are now serving approximately 44,000 students annually—a 65 percent increase since 1989—our funding has remained virtually the same, with \$18,253,000 in state funding and \$5,500,00 in federal funding.

This lack of funding forces pro-

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grams to cut back on services to students. For example, many centers can no longer offer classes at satellite locations, a loss that especially impacts rural areas.

We have also seen a shift in the ratio of full-time to part-time teachers. In 1992, the ratio was 60 percent full-time to 40 percent part-time. Today, the ratio is 40 percent full-time to 60 percent part-time. As would be expected, turnover is high, with part-time teachers often leaving for full-time jobs.

Program Inconsistencies

In Arkansas, there are ever-growing inconsistencies among programs in delivery of services, cost per student and salaries. It is imperative that we assess these inconsistencies and determine how we can best utilize our limited resources to deliver quality education.

For example, not all programs operate year-round; others offer few night classes. The reality, however, is that someone who loses a job in the summer because of poor basic skills cannot wait for classes in the fall. Likewise, someone who works all day to support a family cannot attend classes during the day.

The cost per student varies dramatically among

programs, ranging from \$186.42 to \$2,279.93. While there will always be some variance in cost per student, we must explore ways to make all programs cost-efficient, particularly those with a high cost per student.

Salary is another area with inconsistencies that occur because salaries are determined by the salary scales of the various local education agencies (LEAs). Adult education must cover not only salaries on these various pay scales but also raises or bonuses given by the LEAs. Covering these unfunded costs leads to cuts in other areas such as staff, classes or supplies. Unfortunately, we are already seeing the impact of lack of funding and inconsistencies in delivery on accessibility, and we project that these issues will be further exacerbated with the costs associated with the new federal regulations. The students who need our services suffer when we are forced to reduce services.

There have been many discussions over the past year about these issues and possible options for ensuring that adult education can continue preparing Arkansans for work or postsecondary education and training. We encourage input and will examine all options, with our goal always being to provide students with that second chance to change their lives through adult education.

LESO Facilitates Donation of Eight Tornado Sirens from Conway to Magazine

Chief Boyd Hicks from the city of Magazine Police Department sent a request last fall for tornado sirens – he sent the request through the Arkansas Department of Career Education’s (ACE) Law Enforcement Support Organization (LESO), which sends an e-mail to municipalities enrolled in the program. His request stemmed from the fact that Magazine has a state-of-the-art safe room at the school large enough to shelter all the town’s population but no way to notify people that a storm is coming (short of the firemen driving up and down the street with loud speakers).

Major Bill Milburn of the Conway Police Department saw the request. He knew Conway had eight tornado sirens that worked but were not compatible with the city’s new warning system. Major Millburn arranged for Conway to donate the sirens to Magazine. The sirens were transported to Magazine by a local contractor from Magazine who donated his flat bed trailer to haul the sirens. Rosetta Construction from Springfield, Mo., which is working on a new sewer line in Conway, donated an operator and track hoe to load the bulky sirens.

Magazine plans to keep the sirens it needs and pass the rest on to other small towns with no warning system. Current prices for equipment to perform the same function would be at least \$10,000 per siren, and a town like Magazine could not afford that. This donation is a great example of people working together to help their fellow Arkansans.

LESO assists law enforcement agencies in the acquisition of excess federal property. The only cost to the receiving agency is transportation of the property. Arkansas’s LESO program is under the auspices of the Department of Career Education.



The tornado sirens being loaded on this trailer were donated by the city of Conway to the city of Magazine in January through ACE’s LESO program.

WOMEN continued from page 7

there, we would all huddle in the corner because there was a man in the house. The fear comes back.”

“I had some issues like that when I first came to ACTI,” Veal recalled.

“I have a male instructor, and when you’re turning your tests in, you’re one-on-one. I had about six or seven hours of not wanting to take my assignments in because of that fear coming back. But he and I and my counselor worked through all that. We finally made the connection where I felt comfortable. Now, I’m in a program where I have a male teacher and I’m the only woman in my class, and I’m fine.”

Veal says now it’s like having a million big brothers around campus. “They’re very protective. Once they learned about me and what I had been through, they all want to take care of me,” Veal said.

Although her children are still living with her brother and sister-in-law, Veal talks to them frequently and sends mosaic door plaques she creates in her free time.

“Christmas is really something to look forward to,” Veal said when interviewed this past summer. “I will have graduated from ACTI and I’ll have two weeks with my kids. And I’ll hopefully be enrolling in National Park then.”

Sure enough, Veal graduated ACTI with honors in December and is now continuing her education at National Park Community College in Hot Springs.

“If I can get out, anyone can,” said Veal, when asked what advice she has for others in an abusive situation.

“Don’t ever convince yourself that he will change. You can forgive, but you don’t have to allow yourself to go through that again.”

Kristy Fincel

“I was referred by a women’s shelter in Hot Springs,” Kristy Fincel said when asked how she came to be enrolled and live at ACTI.

“I had been there a year and a half, and my time limit was up. I was going to be back on the street because I had nowhere else to go. If I hadn’t come (to ACTI), I honestly believe I would be dead by now.”

Fincel is originally from a town near Buffalo, N.Y., but came to Arkansas in a few years ago because her mother lived here. For many years before, however, she had no contact with her relatives.

“I came from an abusive family,” Fincel said. “I’ve been abused and molested, and I witnessed my sister being molested for two years.”

She did as children are taught in school; she told her guidance counselors what was happening at home. According to Fincel, her counselors did nothing and reacted to her as if she was only telling them to get attention.

Fincel started “popping pills” at the age of 7 and soon became a heroin addict. When asked how long she was addicted to drugs, she replied, “I’m 32 now, and I’ve been clean for three years.”

Fincel says she lived with her mother about three years, spending the rest of her time either living on the street or in a children’s home, where she was from age 13 to 18.

“When I turned 18, I left the children’s’ home to live with my mom,” said Fincel, whose mother is now deceased. She dropped out of high school a week before graduation because she “wanted to be an adult.”

“And boy, did I become an adult,” Fincel recalls. “I got pregnant but soon lost my son to DHS [Department of Human Services].

She later had a daughter who

was also taken away. Her daughter is now 10 and lives in Arkansas.

“Shortly after my daughter left me, I went into rehab first and then into the women’s shelter,” Fincel said. But after a year and a half her time was up.

“If I hadn’t found this place [ACTI], I would probably be dead. It’s been life-changing for me.”

Once enrolled at the center, she settled on studying to be a certified nursing assistant (CNA) because her mother was a nurse. Fincel said, “I’ve always had an interest in helping others.”

In addition to excelling in her studies, Fincel participated in the ACTI SkillsUSA chapter and brought home the center’s first-ever bronze medal from the national CNA SkillUSA competition.

“SkillsUSA taught me a lot about leadership and a lot about myself,” Fincel said. “The teachers saw something in me that I didn’t see in myself. They encouraged me to keep going.”

And keep going she has. Fincel was offered a CNA position at a local nursing home the day after being interviewed.

“I’ve had other kinds of jobs in the past but couldn’t keep them because I was on drugs,” she recalls. “Back then I didn’t have hope. I have hope now, and I have a brighter future. I don’t need to get high any more; I am high on life.”

Even so, Fincel does yet face a significant challenge: “Getting my daughter back is going to be the hardest,” she said. “But now I’m state-certified, have a job, and I’m getting a house. I have a chance at getting her back now.”

Of her experience at ACTI, Fincel says, “I’ve made a lot of good friends here at the center. This place saved my life.”



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