



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

LISBET R. WARD
CHAIR

L. MAC McARTHUR-FOX
VICE-CHAIR

NORMA DRAPER
SECRETARY

HEIDI L. LAWYER
DIRECTOR

Virginia Board for People with Disabilities

Ninth Street Office Building
202 North 9th Street, 9th Floor
Richmond, VA 23219

(804) 786-0016
1-800-846-4464

TTY or VOICE
FAX (804) 786-1118

www.vaboard.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information contact:

Tom Driscoll, Marketing Manager
thomas.driscoll@vbpd.virginia.gov
804-786-9380 or 800-846-4464

March 20, 2007

Secretary of Health and Human Resources to Present 2006 Virginia Board for People with Disabilities' Community Service Awards

On Monday, March 26, 2007, from 4:00-6:00pm, at the Library of Virginia, The Honorable Marilyn Tavenner, Secretary of Health and Human Resources, will present the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities' 2006 Community Service Awards to recipients **Jack Brandt** and **TecAccess LLC**. Mr. Brandt, recipient of the **2006 Jackie Crews Award for Excellence in Leadership**, is being recognized for his scholarship, advocacy, and policy activities on behalf of greater self-determination and community living opportunities for people with disabilities. TecAccess, recipient of the **2006 Outstanding Achievement Award**, is a Virginia-based and internationally recognized information technology (IT) firm known both for the development and testing of IT accommodations and accessibility for individuals with disabilities and for their training and employment.

Invited guests to the awards presentation will include members of the Virginia Board, senior officials from state and local government, state and local disability services providers, representatives of support and advocacy groups, as well as family and friends of the award recipients.

In addition to the presentation of the awards, the event will feature a display of artwork by Mr. Brandt with accompanying information panels describing the mission of the Virginia Board, the goals and criteria for the awards, and the accomplishments of the award recipients. There will also be a demonstration of an accessible website version of the display developed by TecAccess. Following the event, the display will move to the lobby of the state's 9th Street Office Building, outside the Governor's public office, where it will be available to the public during normal business hours from Tuesday, March 27, through Friday, April 6.

Ed Turner, the Governor's Special Advisor on Disability Issues and recipient of the 2005 Jackie Crews Award, will assist Secretary Tavenner in the presentation of the Awards. Catering for the event will be provided by Max's Positive Vibe Café, recipient of the 2005 Outstanding Achievement Award.

Additional information on the awards and their recipients follows below. To learn more about the Virginia Board, its Community Service Awards, and the 2006 presentation event, please visit the Board's website at www.vaboard.org or contact Tom Driscoll at thomas.driscoll@vbpd.virginia.gov or 804-786-9380.



The Jackie Crews Award recognizes self-advocates who excel in leadership. The four stars on the award logo represent *Independence*, *Productivity*, *Inclusion*, and *Self-Determination*—the four values of leadership and qualities exemplified by Jackie Crews, a graduate of the Virginia Board's Partners in Policymaking (PIP) program who passed away in April 2004.



The Jackie Crews Award
for Excellence in Leadership

Selected by a panel of his peers—fellow PIP graduates—Jack Brandt, a recent graduate of James Madison University, has never let his disability stand in his way. Despite a brain injury at birth and cerebral palsy, he has enthusiastically pursued education, public service, and opportunities to help others.

At JMU, Mr. Brandt was recognized for his academic achievements and studied the impact of disability legislation on the formation of advocacy groups. As an American Association for People with Disabilities' Congressional Intern for Senator Michael Enzi of Wyoming, Mr. Brandt analyzed new federal regulations that affect people with disabilities.

Mr. Brandt has petitioned the state and federal legislatures to expand community supports, including full implementation of the Supreme Court's "Olmstead" decision calling for greater self-determination and opportunities for people with disabilities to live in the least restrictive environments. As a 2006 Governor's Fellow with the Office of Community Integration, he further distinguished himself as a scholar and advocate with broad knowledge and skills in local, state, and federal policy.

An active board member at Valley Associates for Independent Living in Harrisonburg, Mr. Brandt initiated a local "get out the vote" campaign, issued action alerts on important issues, developed policy positions, and encouraged others to become more active in the political process. His exceptional enthusiasm, dedication, and achievements have already won him numerous awards. Along the way, Mr. Brandt has also found the time and energy to develop his skills as an artist and use his artwork to advance his advocacy and encourage others with disabilities to fully develop their abilities and pursue their dreams.



The Outstanding Achievement Award recognizes exemplary service on behalf of people with disabilities that have had a lasting and significant impact on their quality of life and improved the disability services system. It calls attention to new approaches and best practices that produce greater opportunities for self-determination, independence, productivity, and inclusion for people with disabilities in all facets of community life.



TecAccess LLC, recipient of the 2006 Outstanding Achievement Award, and its founder Debra Ruh are local, nationally, and internationally recognized leaders in the development and implementation of information technology accessibility for people with disabilities and in the training and employment of individuals with disabilities. When her daughter, who has Down Syndrome, reached middle school, Ms. Ruh realized just how limited job opportunities are for people with disabilities and decided to start a

business that would focus instead on their abilities and increasing their access to employment and the rapidly expanding worlds of computing and the internet.

That rapidly growing business, TecAccess, has since developed “Section 508” compliance guidelines used by the federal government and has advised and assisted with IT needs for public and private clients from local non-profit organizations to the European Union, including the Commonwealth of Virginia. Most of TecAccess’ diverse and skilled workforce is comprised of individuals with a wide range of physical, sensory, cognitive, and other disabilities who bring the realism and practicality of their own experiences to the challenges of accessibility. To best support and develop their abilities, TecAccess emphasizes flexibility and accommodation in the workplace and employer-employee relationships.

Through their business and advocacy activities, Ms. Ruh and her colleagues strive to stimulate creativity and encourage others to expand opportunities for individuality, freedom, and autonomy. Numerous awards as well as testimonials ranging from Virginia’s senior Senator, John Warner, to federal and state agencies, to local and national business employers and IT providers, to local disability support and advocacy organizations testify to their success in achieving those goals.

###