Retirement Tribute
Dan Will, former Chief of the Facilities Unit in Central Office

With a B.A. in Guidance and Counseling, Dan Will began a job search and quickly realized his chosen career was not a “demand” occupation.

Undaunted, he looked for a different path, finding his way to graduate school with a focus in vocational rehabilitation. Later, through a relative, Dan got a job lead with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS).

“I interviewed with three organizations, DVRS being one of them. On the same day, all three offered me a job, but I chose DVRS because employment seemed more stable there.” Stability was important because Dan had been combining work, summer graduate school, and marriage. The experience “of needing a job and feeling desperate” was one that continued to motivate Dan in both his field and administrative positions.

His initial caseload consisted of persons with developmental disabilities. “That’s how I got to know the workshops. I’d visit a couple of times a week and after a while, it was almost a little disruptive, because the clients would see me and come over to say hello!”

After two years, he moved to a supervisory position and began commuting to the Trenton (local) office, where he joined supervisor, Jack Kelleher. Dan recalls that there were no office managers at that time. There were district managers, and in their absence, the supervisors handled whatever limited managerial duties existed. When managerial positions were created, Dan spent about 14 years in several offices, including New Brunswick and the Monmouth office and all its localities - Red Bank, Eatontown, and Neptune.

He came to Central Office in 1989 when Director Steve Janick called him twice about taking a chief position. The move also included a big lifestyle change due to the lengthy commute and more hours on the road meaning longer work days and less time for home activities. For the most part, the
positives outweighed the negatives. “I learned to like the chief job. I enjoy researching, reading regulations, and writing, which are key parts of the work. Also, you can’t know how things like rules and regulations will affect people until you talk to a lot of people about them. This makes meetings essential, so you can get perspectives and opinions. I enjoy being a communications facilitator, bringing people together for a good cause.”

Dan observes that “all the people I’ve worked with in DDD and DVRS have been working their tails off. It’s a shame state workers don’t get more recognition.” In light of all this, a natural question is “Then why leave now?”

Earlier this year, Dan crunched the numbers and found, to his surprise, that retirement would be a fiscal “ok”. The commute was tedious. Then, recently, he narrowly avoided a bad accident on I-95. “I realized that I didn’t need to do this.”

Selecting the “right time” to leave was difficult. “I like to feel I completed a job or task, but I recognize there will always be a new task or something to be completed.”

Retirement plans include getting accustomed to the idea of not working and exploring community service opportunities, such as volunteering in senior adult ministry. Whatever Dan chooses, it will be part-time, leaving him ample time to enjoy home and family.

Any parting words of wisdom? “Working in Central Office is tougher than one might imagine; out in the field, you are much less aware of the politics involved in getting things done. Also, we need to remember why clients come to us - for a job - and how it might feel if we were in their shoes.”
Graduates of the 2003 and 2004 Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling program celebrated their success and shared their achievements on June 8, at a Graduate Seminar held at the Scotch Plains campus of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey’s (UMDNJ) School of Health Related Professions (SHRP). The event was hosted by the University, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, the State Rehabilitation Council, and the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Besides graduates, attendees included administrators from the New Jersey Department of Labor (NJDOL), Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) and the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI); UMDNJ administration and faculty; DVRS staff who acted as internship supervisors; and managers from offices where internships occurred, or were supervised.

Citing the healing value of rehabilitation work, Dean David Gibson (of UMDNJ-SHRP) welcomed the group and introduced special guests Assistant Commissioner Virginia Pasqualini, DVRS Director Thomas Jennings, CBVI Director Vito DeSantis, Chairman of the Department of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Dr. Kenneth Gill, and Director of the MS in Rehabilitation Counseling program Dr. Janice Oursler.

Dean Gibson presented an award to Director Jennings in recognition of his and DVRS’ role in re-establishing a Rehabilitation Masters program in New Jersey. Assistant Commissioner Pasqualini noted the partnerships needed to make the graduate program a reality and observed that a unique aspect of the 2004 class was that, for the first time, previous program graduates had acted as clinical supervisors for internships. (These supervisors were Fern Allen, Maryann Hanafin, Harriet Passarelli, and Kathy Edwards.) Also recognized were graduates who had received UMDNJ-SHRP awards for excellence in academic or clinical performance. The DVRS recipients were Norma Cordeiro (Newark) and Stacey Smith (Thorofare).

While the event had a festive tone, it had an educational aspect as well. Three student panels described their respective internship projects, all of which were pertinent to several current DVRS initiatives.

• A State Rehabilitation Council Focus Group was designed...
to supplement an ongoing mail survey that is examining consumer satisfaction with DVRS services. Students learned how to recruit for, organize, and run a focus group; they reported that a big challenge was to stick to gathering data and to hold back from counseling the participants. (Information is still being gathered and collated; a report will be forthcoming.)

- As part of a Project Access Grant Demonstration Pilot, students were trained to be outreach “Ambassadors” to Ticket-to-Work recipients who had not yet used their tickets to seek employment services. The goal of the contacts was to have consumers take a first step towards possible employment by meeting with Benefits Planners to discuss their individual situations. Students designed scripts and record keeping strategies; challenges included sticking to the scripts and not giving advice. One observation: disability benefits recipients WANT to work but fear failure and loss of economic or medical security.

- Although Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling is a demand occupation, the appeal as a career among aspiring graduate students is low. One way to improve recruitment is by raising the visibility of the profession. As part of such an effort, interns sought to present information about VR to organizations and schools that might deal with potential VR students. The interns found that students AND teachers were unaware of 1) VR job duties 2) VR as a career option 3) training resources 4) and perhaps most significantly, the availability of VR as a service. Recommendation: marketing to high schoolers as early in the career process as possible.

After the seminars and a panel discussion on the “Graduate School Experience”, participants shared a celebratory luncheon – complete with graduation cake – courtesy of the State Rehabilitation Council.

The class of 2003 had thirteen graduates (seven from DVRS and two from CBVI), while the 2004 class had 20 graduates (eight from DVRS and two from CBVI). Now, NJDVRs can boast that 80% of its professional staff has Masters degrees. Although future graduating classes will be smaller, there are yet more degrees to come!
Effective July 1, 2004, the New York State Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped reassigned administrative responsibility for the counties previously served by the Rochester district office to the Syracuse and Buffalo district offices. Although staff will remain in the Rochester area, administrative responsibilities for the Syracuse and Buffalo district offices have been expanded.

The Buffalo district office, which will continue to serve Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genessee, Niagara, Orleans and Wyoming counties, is now responsible for Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Wayne and Stueben counties for VR and elderly services.

In addition to their current responsibility for Broome, Cayuga, Chenango, Cortland, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga, Oswego, Tioga, and Tompkins counties, the Syracuse district office now has responsibility for Chemung, Seneca, Schuyler, and Yates counties. Children’s services for Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Wayne and Stueben counties is also the responsibility of the Syracuse office.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, Children’s Consultant, Orientation and Mobility Specialist and Rehabilitation Teacher previously assigned to Rochester office continue to maintain their presence in Rochester area; only the supervisory responsibilities have changed as a result of this realignment. Consumers in the Rochester area can be assured that the commitment of the CBVH Rochester area staff and the quality of services they provide remains unchanged.

To contact the CBVH office in your area call 1-866-871-3000 (TDD 1-866-871-6000).

Textbooks for Blind Students

Textbooks for blind or visually impaired students lack the enticing photographs, illustrations, charts, maps and other visual images found in a standard primary or secondary school textbook. A full book may comprise as many as 15 to 20 bound volumes, and all the helpful graphic components are useless unless the teacher describes them. Moreover, locating a highlighted vocabulary word is cumbersome and difficult.

The learning status quo for these students may be changing, however, as the result of a project completed by assistive technology experts at UB. With $400,000 in funding from the U.S. Department of Education, Kathleen A. Beaver, Christine Oddo and Sumana Silverheels spent the past two years developing a prototype social studies electronic textbook - more precisely, 13 social-studies prototype electronic textbooks and 10 supplements for grades 2 through 10 - that includes text, as well as descriptions of all graphic elements.

The electronic files are designed for use with an ingenious classroom-friendly device called a portable refreshable Braille note-taker. The device converts electronic text into speech and into Braille that is “refreshed:” produced as a ticker tape-like continuous stream that is created by moveable pins on a keyboard, which the fingers read the way the eye would track words across a page. The student can listen to the textbook or read it in Braille. The new electronic textbooks will be available for use in classrooms across the nation this spring.
The Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Technology Transfer (T2RERC) at the University at Buffalo has received a **$4.75 million five-year grant from the National Institute on Disability Rehabilitation Research** to research, evaluate, transfer and commercialize assistive devices for persons with disabilities.

The T2RERC, which is beginning its third competitive five-year grant cycle, facilitates the introduction of new and improved products into the marketplace to meet employment, education, recreation and independent living needs of people with disabilities. This latest grant brings total federal funding of the center to $16.75 million.

Since its inception, the T2RERC, with its community based partner, the Western New York Independent Living Center, **has put 21 new products into the hands of consumers.**

One of the most successful recent examples of T2RERC’s collaboration with industry is the Black & Decker® LidsOff™ Automatic Jar Opener, which was introduced in June 2003. A boon to persons with poor grip strength, it sold out of its initial production run.

UB President John B. Simpson, who announced the grant at a press conference, called it “important recognition both of the excellence of the innovative research being conducted at UB in assistive technology, as well as our university’s ability to shape the future of vital technology transfer.”

“The quality of the work in development at T2RERC and our Center for Assistive Technology directly contributes to a better way of life for millions of people, and with this latest in a long line of grants, UB is being recognized as a true vanguard in the field,” Simpson added. “I am pleased by this recognition of the important impact and real-world benefits of our research within the School of Public Health and Health Professions, and I anticipate much continued success in the future.”

The center is one unit under the umbrella of UB’s Center for Assistive Technology, which is part of the UB School of Public Health and Health Professions. Maurizio Trevisan, M.D., interim dean of the school and a professor in the Department of Social and Preventive Medicine, said the renewal is a clear indication of the ongoing importance of the center’s work.

“The fact that the center is entering its third five-year grant cycle validates the outstanding work done to date by center investigators and staff and their insights into the future,” Trevisan said.

“The grant is particularly gratifying because it builds on UB’s pioneering work in the field of assistive devices and technology, which exemplifies the overarching mission of the School of Public Health and Health Professions -- to improve the health and quality of life of all people.”
Grant supports ongoing efforts to develop products to meet disability needs

life of Western New Yorkers and residents of New York State.”

Stephen M. Bauer, Ph.D., UB clinical assistant professor of rehabilitation science and director of the T2RERC, said the new grant will support several new endeavors.

“In the next five years, the center will carry out four development projects aimed at introducing new products into the market place, and complete four research projects that will advance the state-of-the-art of the technology transfer discipline,” said Bauer.

Three of the development projects will continue the center’s work in shepherding promising products to the marketplace, he noted. Researchers will concentrate on validating technology needs of the assistive technology industry, finding solutions to those needs and integrating consumers’ functional requirements into new products.

“The final development project will involve collaboration with the UB School of Informatics,” Bauer said. This project will help the national network of Rehabilitation Engineering Research Centers and the broader community of technology transfer organizations make better use of technology transfer methods and knowledge.

“Three of the T2RERC research projects will focus on defining effective technology transfer practices,” Bauer said. Researchers will analyze case studies of especially successful products, review federal technology transfer programs for effectiveness, and conduct market research on relevant industry sectors.

The fourth research project will involve laboratory and home trials of transferred and marketed products to assess the value and utility of these products to consumers.

“Collectively, these projects will generate new knowledge necessary to improve on the theory and practice of technology transfer, both for the field of assistive technology and beyond,” Bauer said.

The new grant builds on the center’s past success in bringing products to the marketplace that help solve lifestyle and safety problems for persons with disabilities.

In addition to the Black & Decker® LidsOff™ Automatic Jar Opener, new products developed by the center include:

* The **PowerCheq™**, a revolutionary battery management system for power wheelchairs and scooters, extends battery life up to 300 percent and increases the daily operating time by more than 20 percent without increasing the battery size. “The PowerCheq™ saves the user hundreds of dollars annually and significantly improves user safety,” Bauer said.

* **UpStop**, a newly patented braking system for manual wheelchairs, engages a set of brakes automatically when the occupant begins to exit, preventing the wheelchair from rolling forward or backward and dislodging the occupant.

Bauer said several more products, some of which will improve radically the way persons with disabilities live their lives, are in the pipeline, and will advance to the marketplace with the help of the center’s new grant.

* The **Accenda Accessible Remote Control**,” is a voice-operated remote control unit for home entertainment systems, including DVD and TV equipment, VCRs and stereos. The Accenda allows persons with impaired vision and mobility to control all functions of these products with voice commands.
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