

NEWS RELEASE | FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE | October 28, 2019

Two North Dakota businesses receive statewide awards for supporting the employment of people with disabilities

Cash Wise of Minot and Bismarck Larks receive statewide awards

BISMARCK, N.D. – As part of its National Disability Employment Awareness Month observance, the North Dakota Department of Human Services' Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) recognized two businesses for supporting an inclusive workforce by hiring, training and inspiring people with disabilities to excel in the workforce.

The agency and State Rehabilitation Council presented the 2019 North Dakota State DVR Employer of the Year award to **Cash Wise Foods of Minot** and the You Make A Difference Award to the **Bismarck Larks**. Company representatives accepted the awards at a recognition luncheon hosted at the division's annual training conference in Bismarck.

State Rehabilitation Council members and the division selected Cash Wise of Minot from among five nominees for the Employer of the Year award. The award honors a North Dakota employer for their efforts to support and inspire individuals with disabilities to achieve employment goals and to reach their full potential in their community.

Cash Wise was selected because they regularly work with the division and local disability service providers to hire, train and support individuals with disabilities so they can be successful at work. If the store doesn't have a perfect job match for an individual's skills, they let them meet with different departments to find the best fit and identify specific job duties individuals can perform. Cash Wise also provides positive and constructive feedback and opportunities to increase individuals' skills. In addition, the store is accessible to employees and customers with disabilities, featuring accessible restrooms and wide aisles free of barriers restricting movement.

"We are honored to receive the employer of the year award," said Tanya Andre, Cash Wise Foods' Senior HR Generalist. "We work closely with each employee to ensure they become successful, independent and a valuable team member of the Cash Wise family. We are so happy with the experience we have had with DVR and their partners and look forward to working with them in the future."

These other nominees received honorable mention: Valley News Live, **Fargo**; Culver's of **Williston**; the Social Security Administration, **Bismarck**; and TownePlace Suites, **Dickinson**. All have established ongoing partnerships with the division and its regional offices and support the employment of people with disabilities.

The statewide You Make a Difference Award honors a business for consistently recognizing individuals' unique abilities, providing work experience opportunities for students with disabilities, and actively supporting, developing and inspiring students to achieve goals in a competitive and integrated employment setting.

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The Bismarck Larks have collaborated with HIT and DVR to hire transition-age students and other individuals with disabilities who may have little to no work experience. The Larks organization matches employees' interests and skills with positions to find a good fit, encourages employees to explore different roles while having fun, and works around students' and families' summer schedules.

Bismarck Larks General Manager John Bollinger said: "While we are beyond honored to accept this award, the true praise and recognition goes to our amazing employees with disabilities who provided exceptional service to our fans and helped further the Larks mission of using fun to make a difference in people's lives."

Acting DVR Division Director Robyn Throlson said, "Our agency is pleased to recognize this year's business award recipients who are willing to work alongside the division and our agency partners to give individuals opportunities to apply, be interviewed and be hired for job openings based on their unique strengths and abilities."

She said employers can meet their workforce needs by looking beyond a disability to an individual's unique abilities, and the division can help them reach their employee recruitment and retention goals.

"Employees who receive vocational rehabilitation support often become long-term employees who are promoted within their respective workplaces," said Throlson.

Rehabilitation counseling and consultation is available without charge to qualifying individuals and businesses, nonprofits and government agencies. Services for individuals with disabilities can include assistance with diagnosis and evaluation, vocational counseling and training to identify and reach employment goals, adaptive equipment and restorative services, vocational training and education, job placement and follow-up and other services.

For information, visit www.nd.gov/dhs/dvr/index.html or contact the division at 701-328-8950, toll-free 800-755-2745, 711 (TTY), or via email at dhsvr@nd.gov.

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CONTACT:

Heather Steffl | 701-328-4933
hsteffl@nd.gov

LuWanna Lawrence | 701-328-1892
lklawrence@nd.gov