

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
600 E. Boulevard Ave., Bismarck ND 58505-0250**

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Media contacts: Heather Steffl at 701-328-4933 or LuWanna Lawrence at 701-328-1892

Two western N.D. employers receive statewide honors for supporting employment of people with disabilities

BISMARCK, N.D. – North Dakota excels in many things, including the employment rate of people with disabilities. North Dakota has one of the highest rates in the country.

In recognition of *National Disability Employment Awareness Month*, the North Dakota Department of Human Services' Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) recognized two employers from western North Dakota for their commitment to supporting an inclusive workforce, where individual abilities are celebrated.

The division presented **2018 North Dakota State DVR Employer of the Year award to Pro IT**, a North Dakota-based technology company with locations in **Crosby, Minot and Williston, N.D.**, and employees in other states and Canada. Company representatives accepted the award at a recognition luncheon hosted at the division's annual training conference in Bismarck late last week.

The State Rehabilitation Council and the division selected Pro IT from among five nominees. The award honors a North Dakota business owner or employer for their efforts to support and inspire individuals with disabilities to achieve employment goals and to reach their full potential in their community.

Pro IT was selected because of their willingness to hire individuals with disabilities, including unique communication barriers, who have limited work histories and experience in their industry. Pro IT provides mentoring and encouragement to employees to create an inclusive work environment.

"We are humbled and honored to receive the employer of the year award and are proud to be able to place employees with unique challenges within our company," said Pro IT owner Steve Kemp. "In a competitive labor market, DVR helps fill positions that you otherwise may not be able to fill and helps pay for on-the-job training. The DVR staff is helpful and supportive to ensure a positive outcome. We couldn't be happier with our experience and look forward to working with them in the future!"

These other nominees received honorable mention: Cashwise, West Fargo; Dollar Tree, Inc., Minot; Goodwill Thrift Stores, Grand Forks; and Quality Inn and Suites, Jamestown. These employers have established ongoing partnerships with the division and its regional offices and support the employment of people with disabilities.

The division also recognized **Goodwill Store of Minot** by presenting the organization with the **You Make A Difference Award**.

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This statewide award honors a business for consistently recognizing individuals' unique abilities, providing work experience opportunities for students with disabilities and actively supporting, developing and inspiring the students to achieve their full potential and reach their employment goals and in maintaining competitive and integrated employment.

The Goodwill Store of Minot has been a longtime supporter of a diverse, inclusive workforce and often serves as a training site for students and other individuals with disabilities. The Minot store was recognized for collaborating with staff from the Vocational Rehabilitation office in Minot and Minot Public Schools to support students who have little to no work experience. They make it possible for students to learn how to be dependable and valued employees and team members who can provide customer service and merchandising support on the sales floor and stock room. Students often progress in roles, responsibilities and wages and are coached and empowered to make decisions.

In accepting the award, Goodwill West Regional Manager Steve Carbno said, "We are excited to receive this award. It's an affirmation of the work we do with Vocational Rehabilitation in placing persons with disabilities at our location in Minot."

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."

"By looking beyond the disability," she said, "employers can meet their workforce needs. Employees who receive Vocational Rehabilitation support have become long-term employees and have been promoted within their respective workplaces. The division looks forward to helping other employers with their recruitment and retention needs."

Vocational rehabilitation services help people with disabilities find meaningful work and help employers connect with a valuable, often untapped workforce and retain trained workers whose abilities have changed. 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, TTY 701-328-8968 or ND Relay TTY 800-366-6888, or via email at dhsvr@nd.gov.

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