

NEWS RELEASE | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | December 1, 2020

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

Dakota Estates Retirement Center of Lidgerwood and Scheels in Minot receive statewide awards

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Human Services' Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has 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 selected **Dakota Estates Retirement Center of Lidgerwood** as the 2020 North Dakota State VR Employer of the Year award recipient. **Scheels of Minot** was recognized with the You Make A Difference Award.

Dakota Estates Retirement Center was selected from among six nominees and was recognized for efforts to support and inspire individuals with disabilities to achieve employment goals and to reach their full potential in their community.

Fargo VR office team members who nominated Dakota Estates for the honor said the retirement center is willing to make opportunities work for individuals with disabilities and provides flexibility and stability along with a welcoming environment for both employees with disabilities and for VR clients.

“Dakota Estates has been blessed to serve as a host agency and to work with Vocational Rehabilitation,” said facility Administrator Curt Brownslee. “We have been fortunate to have had employees who have come to us through the Vocational Rehab Program, and it has definitely been a true joy to watch these individuals turn their disabilities into abilities, as they strive and work to accomplish their goals.”

These other nominees received honorable mention: Montessori of Minot Inc. – Acorn Hollow Early Learning Center, **Minot**; Sam's Club, **Grand Forks**; Z's Fresh Market, **Ellendale**; North Dakota Department of Human Services – Human Resources Division, **Bismarck**; and Walmart, **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 one business annually 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.

Scheels' in Minot was recognized with the You Make a Different Award for providing students with disabilities with temporary work experiences in a variety of departments and roles so students could find a position matching their talents and interests and leading some to transition to long-term employment.

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Employers honored for supporting employment of people with disabilities – page 2

Nominators also praised the store’s workplace culture. They said work experience students from the Minot area feel welcomed and accepted from the moment they begin the HR onboarding process, through on-the-job training and afterwards as students work alongside experienced employees who are quick to answer questions and assist as needed.

Kim Poppinga, the human resource assistant store lead for Scheels in Minot, commented on the recognition. “Scheels is very honored to receive the *You Make A Difference Award* from VR. We enjoy the ability to make a difference in the lives of the individuals VR serves. Scheels takes great pride in seeing them achieve the personal goals they set for themselves, and we are so grateful for the unique talents, contagious smiles and great attitude they bring to our store every day.”

Acting VR Division Director Robyn Throlson said, “The division is happy to recognize this year’s business award recipients who have collaborated with us and our agency partners to give individuals opportunities to achieve their employment goals and work competitively, utilizing their unique strengths and abilities.”

She said the division can help employers reach their employee recruitment and retention goals. Division staff members also provide assessments and counseling to help individuals identify strengths and goals, to connect individuals to training, education, assistive technology and supportive services and to provide job placement assistance.

To receive VR services, North Dakotans must have a disability that is an obstacle to employment, and they must want to work and be available to work.

Information about VR services is available online at www.nd.gov/dhs/dvr/index.html or by contacting the division at 1000 E. Divide Ave., Bismarck, N.D., 58501, 701-328-8950, toll-free 800-755-2745, 711 (TTY) or dhsvr@nd.gov.

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