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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITY NAMES 2013 AWARD WINNERS

Winners exemplify standards of excellence in enhancing life for individuals living with disabilities

JEFFERSON CITY, MO, January 24th, 2013 - The Governor's Council on Disability (GCD) has selected the award winner and honorable mention of the **22nd Annual Inclusion Award** and the winner of the **1st Annual Youth Leadership Award**.

The Inclusion Award and one Honorable Mention are presented annually to recognize private and public employers, individuals, and organizations that have successfully included people with disabilities in education, employment, housing, and leisure activities. Individuals are also encouraged to nominate state and local government divisions or employees they truly feel excel in inclusive practices.

The 2013 Inclusion Award winner is Deborah Baldini, University of Missouri St. Louis (UMSL)

UMSL has emerged as a leader in fostering a culture of inclusion for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities with the implementation of its [SUCCEED](#) program. UMSL has spent the last five years developing this program, utilizing the principles of universal design. SUCCEED is a post-secondary program that allows people with disabilities the opportunity to live on campus, while taking classes that help them focus on employment that matches their skills and interests, and experiencing internships with local employers. The program was initially proposed to UMSL by Dr. Deborah Baldini, a parent of an individual with an intellectual disability and Associate Dean for the College of Arts and Sciences at UMSL. Her vision, commitment and leadership lead to the implementation of the SUCCEED program for the 2013-14 Academic Year. SUCCEED is the only residential post-secondary program in the State of Missouri at this time.

The Honorable Mention for 2013 goes to Jeff and Andrea Cunningham; Melaina's Magical Playland

Jeff and Andrea Cunningham had a beautiful little girl named Melaina. Born with NemaLine Myopathy, Melaina died from complications of her condition and has been the inspiration for the all-inclusive, [accessible playground](#) that is now a reality in Cape Girardeau. The Cunninghams formed a not-for-profit organization that worked to raise the funds to build this inclusive playground. Adults and children of all abilities now have access to a playground where children with disabilities can play alongside their peers without disabilities, and adults with disabilities can play with their children.

First Annual Youth Leadership Award winner is Aaron Likens

New in 2013, the Governor's Council on Disability initiated a program to award an annual Youth Leadership Award to recognize an outstanding Missouri youth (age 18-30) with a disability that has demonstrated exemplary leadership by making a difference in their community.

The winner of the 2013 Youth Leadership Award is Aaron Likens, a young man who was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome at the age of 20. After receiving his diagnosis and finding his way to a career of being an Autism Ambassador for Easter Seals Life Skills, Aaron began to spread the word about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). He is an accomplished speaker, having led presentations to more than 37,000 people in Missouri over the last three and a half years. He is also a published author of a book titled "Finding Kansas: Decoding the Enigma of Asperger's Syndrome" and a blog, "[Life on the Other Side of the Wall](#)," which has thousands of followers. Aaron's most recent focus is on speaking to students with the hope of reducing bullying by increasing awareness.

For more information on the Inclusion Award, go [here](#). For more information on the Youth Leadership Award, go [here](#). For additional information, please contact the GCD at 573-751-2600 or via e-mail at gcd@oa.mo.gov.

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