

Governor's Council on Disability

2008 Inclusion Award Winners

The winners of the 17th Annual Inclusion Awards are:

The 2008 **Bob Aldridge Advocate of the Year** is Jennifer Smith, Missouri Botanical Garden, St. Louis.

As the supervisor of therapeutic horticulture programs, Ms. Smith embodies the philosophy of inclusion and has expanded a personal outreach to include students and adults with disabilities. Well beyond the scope of her job description, Ms. Smith has educated herself with the Americans with Disabilities Act and has tackled the challenge of identifying potential obstacles in the Garden. She has sought to educate and inform appropriate personnel to provide a safe and meaningful experience, striving to make the Missouri Botanical Garden "state of the art" and accessible for all patrons.

The winner of this year's **Excellence in Universal Design and Technology Award** is Unlimited Play, O'Fallon.

It was a three-year old boy named Zachary who provided the inspiration behind Unlimited Play. When his mother would take Zachary to the playgrounds it would only emphasize his limitations. Even more frustrating was the fact that the playgrounds stopped him from interacting with other children. After visiting an accessible playground in Virginia, Zachary's mother began to dream such a playground would exist in the St. Louis Area. This playground was made possible by collaboration between Unlimited Play, Lake St. Louis Parks department, and the Developmental Disabilities Resource Board. This park has been the most attended park in Lake St. Louis, not just by people with disabilities but by everyone in the community.

The top honor in the category of **Large Employer of the Year** will be awarded to AMC Theatres, Kansas City.

AMC is passionate about providing people with disabilities the best possible movie going experience and including them in the workforce. At a recent Disability Mentoring event in Kansas City, AMC hired a new employee with a disability. AMC is a founding business member in establishing a Business Leadership Network chapter in Kansas City. AMC actively hires people with disabilities through their targeted recruitment efforts.

AMC has partnered with the Autism Society of America on a program called "Sensory Friendly Films," which brings families affected by autism a special opportunity to enjoy movies in a safe and accepting environment. AMC has offered captioned movies for their customers with hearing impairments and descriptive video for their customers with visual impairment. In summary, AMC has a longstanding and unwavering commitment to provide accessibility and inclusiveness for guests and associates with disabilities.

The winner of this year's **Small Employer of the Year Award** is Subway in Macon. Karen Bealmer owns and operates the Subway restaurant in Macon. She has employed several employees with disabilities to be part of their winning team. Many of her employees with disabilities have been employed for several years. Teenaged employees who come to work at Subway often develop a new way of thinking about working with people with disabilities resulting in a pride in working as a team.

The 2008 winner of the **Educator of the Year Award** is Sister Jean Diedrich, Helias High School, Jefferson City.

Sr. Jean has been instrumental in providing an inclusive school environment at Helias High School for several students with disabilities. She provides the supports or accommodations to students with a disability to be as independent as possible.

The Bob Aldridge Award and the Universal Design and Technology Award will be presented at the Power Up conference in Columbia on April 28, 2009. The Large Employer, Small Employer and Educator awards will be presented in the winners' local communities.

For additional information, please contact the Council at 573-751-2600 or by email at gcd@oa.mo.gov. Governor's Council on Disability: www.disabilityinfo.mo.gov, click on Governor's Council on Disability, then Inclusion Awards.