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Lt. Governor Kleefisch, Secretary Newson Congratulate Graduates of Northeastern Wisconsin Job Training Program for People with Disabilities

Collaboration with Walgreens leads to employment for job seekers with disabilities

GREEN BAY – Lt. Governor Rebecca Kleefisch and Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Reggie Newson today congratulated the latest graduates of an on-the-job training program for people with disabilities, a state partnership with Walgreens that puts individuals on a path to employment and independence.

Since May 2012, the DWD Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) has partnered with Walgreens in the national drugstore chain's **Retail Employees with Disabilities Initiative (REDI)**. The success of the early pilot in Milwaukee led the state and Walgreens to expand the program at Walgreens stores across the state. Besides the Milwaukee area, REDI participants are receiving retail sales training in stores in Green Bay, Appleton, Menasha and Madison, and the Green Bay graduation is the latest example of the successful initiative.

"In partnership with Walgreens, Wisconsin continues to lead the way in providing employment opportunities for people with disabilities," Lt. Governor Kleefisch said at the graduation ceremony held in the Green Bay State Office Building. "Our successful collaboration with Walgreens in the REDI program drew national attention at the National Governors Association summer meeting in Milwaukee. On behalf of Governor Walker, I'm pleased to congratulate the latest REDI graduates, as we continue to build on a record of success in helping people with disabilities become independent through employment."

Lt. Governor Kleefisch also presented two Green Bay Walgreens stores with commendations from the Governor to recognize their involvement in the project. Wisconsin was one of the first states to team up with the drugstore chain as part of its nationwide rollout last year Walgreens first piloted REDI in Texas in 2010 and expanded to stores in New York and Connecticut.

"The REDI program is a great example of what we can achieve when we work together," Secretary Newson said. "We very much appreciate the strong working relationship we have with Walgreens in helping people with disabilities reach their employment goals. To this end, the REDI program is having a tremendous impact. With it and other DVR programs, we are empowering individuals, helping them become independent."

Governor Walker proclaimed the month of October as Disability Employment Awareness Month in Wisconsin, and the REDI graduation ceremony served to highlight vocational rehabilitation services, what people with disabilities have to offer employers and efforts to connect these job seekers with employers.

The seven REDI graduates honored in Green Bay today bring the statewide total of successful REDI participants to 69. Of the REDI graduates thus far, 46 are employed by Walgreens. Of the remaining graduates, six are working for other employers. Abigail Perez was one of the seven REDI graduates at the Green Bay ceremony.

"The REDI program was nice because it gave me an opportunity to learn different things," Perez said. "The job coaches were excellent and the store management, along with the employees, were very supportive. I gained a lot of experience with retail that I wouldn't have been able to gain without this program. I also loved that I was able to utilize my bilingual talents as well!"

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Walgreens expects to launch the REDI program in additional locations in Wisconsin, where the drugstore chain operates more than 220 stores. In addition to the new sites in Green Bay, REDI training has been or will be offered in 19 stores in Wisconsin. Other sites include Appleton, Franklin, Kaukauna, Madison, Milwaukee, Oconomowoc, Oshkosh, Racine, Wauwatosa and West Bend.

DVR partnered with We Are HOPE, Inc. to facilitate training at the Green Bay locations.

DVR is the state's premier program to provide employment services and counseling to people with disabilities who face substantial barriers to employment. In 2013, DVR served more than 17,000 Wisconsin residents with disabilities and placed 3,840 people in jobs. These newly employed individuals are projected to earn \$66.3 million annually, representing a 206 percent return on the public investment in their services. DVR's budget is 78.7% federal funded with a 21.3% state match required for each federal dollar allotted to Wisconsin.

For more about the Walgreens REDI program: http://www.walgreens.com/topic/sr/disability_inclusion_home.jsp

For more about DVR: <http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dvr/>