

ESBLN Eastern Shore Business Leadership Network
By Jackie Gast, Director

I believe most people are good. Recently, someone told me that a friend of theirs hired a person with a disability who we'll call Fred. The employer, John, thought he was doing a good thing by giving this guy a chance. After three months or so, Fred asked to work less time. More requests followed to the point where Fred was no longer doing the job he was hired to do. Being a small employer and exhausting other options, John, had to let Fred go. Fred turned around and sued John for discrimination due to his disability. As it turned out, Fred had done this before. Unfortunately, there are some Fred's out there who are from all races, creeds, abilities, gender, etc. It kind of reminds me of the McDonald's hot coffee case.

The real fact is that according to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) sources, as well as lawyers who try these cases, it is very difficult to win ADA lawsuits. Even more of a reality is that most working individuals with disabilities do not want to draw attention to their disability and many do not believe they have a disability. That means very few sue. Like it or not, the perception of a disability is that one has a weakness and who likes going around advertising that we have a weakness?

The few people like Fred make big news but did you hear about Pittman and Doris Carey of Pocomoke City, MD who recently won the Easter Seal/AgrAbility Award from the Delaware Maryland AgriAbility Project? The following is from a press release from Easter Seals on the Eastern Shore. "The award is given to a farmer to recognize the perseverance and tenacity they have displayed in continuing to farm despite the set-backs from an injury, disability or health condition.

Pittman Carey's life changed significantly in 2004 when he had to have his right leg amputated eight inches below the knee. A hard worker before the amputation, "Pete" had no plans to retire from his farming duties. Although he learned how to walk with a prosthesis, Pete was still experiencing difficulty transporting feed and equipment to repair fences and in the care of the 50 head of cattle he raises.

The Delaware-Maryland AgrAbility Project was able to provide assistance in guiding Pete towards the Assistive Technology (AT) that would best meet his needs on the farm. Steps were added to his tractors and a Gator provided the relief from the discomfort Pete was having each time he performed work tasks." Easter Seals performed an in-home assessment to modify the bathroom and kitchen areas for Pete. (For more information call 1-877-204-3276 or go to the website at www.de-mdagrability.org).

Fortunately, there are a vast majority of good people stories like Pete's. Let's work on getting those printed!

The ESBLN assists business in the employment of people with all types of disabilities. For more information, e-mail esblnjg@aol.com or visit www.esbln.org.