

BLNs WORK!



Florida's Local

BUSINESS LEADERSHIP NETWORKS
Promoting the Employment of People with Disabilities

A Periodic Newsletter of Florida's Local Business Leadership Networks

**Organized and Staffed by Wilson Resources, Inc. (WRI)
Affiliated with the Florida Business Leadership Network, Organized by The Able Trust,
And the United States Business Leadership Network
Funded in 2007 by Workforce Florida, Inc. and the Agency for Persons with Disabilities**

June 2008

BACKGROUND: The United States Business Leadership Network (BLN) mission is to promote the successful inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce through the organization of employer-to-employer networks. Initially funded by the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Florida's first local Business Leadership Networks began in April 2004 when the Miami-Dade BLN was founded by Wilson Resources, Inc. (WRI) in conjunction with Best Buddies Jobs and the law firm of Holland and Knight LLP. That same year the Big Bend and Polk County BLNs were founded. When the FDDC funding ended, the Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) with its federal Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) and state dollars contracted with WRI to continue the three existing BLNs and expand into five other Florida communities. In 2007, six of the BLNs were funded by Workforce Florida and four were funded by APDs' MIG.

Today there are 10 award-winning local Florida Business Leadership Networks working with WRI: Big Bend (Tallahassee), First Coast (Jacksonville), Ft. Myers, Gainesville, Greater Orlando, Miami-Dade, Palm Beach, Panama City, Polk County, and Tampa Bay Metro. The local Florida BLNs developed and maintain a website: www.myabilities.org

The BLNs have more than 600 employer members. The statewide BLN champion is Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida. Other involved companies include: Walt Disney World Co., The Federal Reserve Bank, Home Depot, SunTrust Banks, the State of Florida, Busch Gardens, SeaWorld, Holland and Knight Law Firm, Lockheed Martin,

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Hyatt Hotels, Merrill Lynch, the University of Miami, Walgreens, AmeriGroup, CVS, Publix, Albertsons, and hundreds of other large and small businesses across the state.

MISSION STATEMENT: *The mission of the local Florida Business Leadership Networks is to educate and encourage employers to recruit, hire, train and retain employees with disabilities as part of promoting best practices.*

Composed of volunteers from their local business communities, the BLNs offer leadership by example and a supportive employer-to-employer network. They seek to promote and support the employment of qualified people who just happen to have disabilities. BLN meetings are held bi-monthly or quarterly, depending on each BLN's development.

LOCAL FLORIDA BUSINESS LEADERSHIP NETWORK THREE MAJOR GOALS:

1. Educate BLN members on the benefits of and how-to employ people with disabilities through educational programs at each meeting and at their corporate offices;
2. Educate other employers in the local communities through outreach and training; and
3. Provide "no-risk" opportunities for employers and their employees to experience people with disabilities in their worksites and to offer students and adults with disabilities opportunities to gain work experience through employment, internships and mentoring.

LOCAL FLORIDA BLN AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

- 2005 Miami Dade BLN Received the United States Business Leadership Network (USBLN) "Chapter of the Year Award"
- 2005 EEOC Named Florida's Local BLNs a Model Public/Private Partnership
- 2006 Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities Received USBLN "Partner of the Year Award" for Funding the Local BLNs
- 2006 Comcast Cable Received USBLN "Employer of the Year Award" for its work with the Big Bend BLN and Employing People with Disabilities
- 2007 Big Bend BLN Received 2007 Florida BLN "Chapter of the Year Award"
- 2007 Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida Received the Florida "Employer of the Year Award" for its work with the Local BLNs and Efforts to Reform its Corporate Culture to Include People with Disabilities
- 2007 Holland and Knight Law Firm won USBLN "Employer of the Year Award" for its work with the local BLNs

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SHARING OF CORPORATE “BEST PRACTICES” BY BLN CORPORATE

MEMBERS: The 2007-08 annual BLN member survey found that BLN members want to know more about what other companies are doing to recruit and hire people with disabilities. The following companies and organizations have been presenting at BLN meetings.

Walgreens - Nationwide *Employment of People with Disabilities Initiative*

Home Depot - The Home Depot's *Corporate Diversity Initiative*

Lockheed Martin Corporation - *Focus on Ability* initiative, the company's goal to become a worldwide employer of choice for people with disabilities

SunTrust Banks - *Focus on Ability Initiative*

Publix - *Publix – Our People are the Difference*

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida - *Tools (Accommodations) for People with Disabilities at Work*, part of BCBSF's goal to become an employer of choice for people with disabilities over the next few years.

Hyatt Hotels - Hyatt's *Hiring Successes* and its *Hands-On Program*, which trains workers with disabilities in the culinary arts.

Eladio Amores – Corporate Consultant for the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, is an active BLN team member and has presented on the employment of people with disabilities at BLN meetings, community training sessions and corporate offices across Florida.

LOCAL FLORIDA BLN EFFECTIVENESS: Florida's local Business Leadership Network members are opening their doors to employees with disabilities, according to the *2007-08 Pre and Post BLN Member Survey*. Between 2006 and 2007, the percent of respondents saying that as a result of their “BLN involvement” they hired, mentored or provided internships to workers with disabilities rose from 46 to 62 percent, a 16 percent increase. Of the 631 employer members in the 10 local BLNs working with Wilson Resources, Inc. (WRI), 138 responded to the BLN survey in 2007, a response rate of 22 percent. In 2006 and 2007, 230 BLN members responded to the survey.

The survey also found that attitudes at all corporate levels were the leading barrier to the employment of people with disabilities, specifically employees' and mid-level managers' attitudes/fears. This is consistent with last year's findings. Training was most frequently cited as the solution to overcome hurdles to the employment of people with disabilities. The second leading barrier was, “Aligning individuals with a disability with the right job fit.” This is good news because it shows that employers are beginning to think more about bringing people with disabilities into their workplaces as well-matched employees.

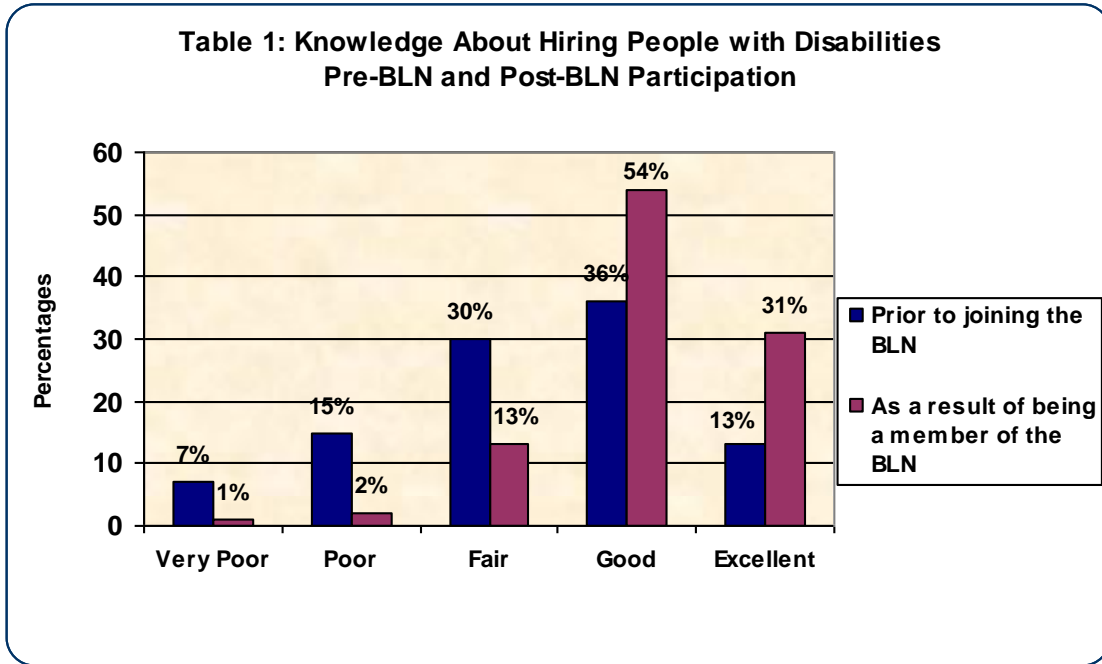
As a result of becoming a BLN member, 85 percent of the respondents rated their knowledge about hiring people with disabilities “good to excellent.” The percentage of respondents knowing more about hiring people with disabilities nearly doubled, from 49

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percent pre-BLN involvement to 85 percent post-BLN involvement. These data are identical to the 2006-07 findings (see Table 1.)

These survey findings show that the local Florida BLNs are having the desired effect. In addition to educating and changing employers' attitudes about hiring people with disabilities, nearly two-out-of-three of the responses (62%) indicated the employers had taken the desired action by bringing people with disabilities into their workplaces.



LOCAL FLORIDA BLN 2007 PAID INTERNSHIP PILOT PROGRAM: The local Florida BLNs learned from members' comments and the 2006-07 *BLN Employer Survey* that employers wanted "no-risk" opportunities to "experience people with disabilities in their workplaces." In response, in August 2006, the Miami-Dade BLN applied to the Florida Able Trust for a grant to initiate an internship program that would reimburse 13 employers for 240 hours plus 7.65 percent payroll taxes when they hired an intern with a disability. The BLN reimbursed the employers and the employers paid the interns. The hope was that at the end of the internship, the employer would hire the intern. If the intern was not hired, two goals would be met: 1) The employer and its employees would have experienced people with disabilities in their workplaces; and 2) Workers with disabilities would have "paid" work experience and references to add to their resumes. The pilot program will end June 2008. Nine internships have been completed; 5 (55%) of the interns secured paid positions.

Encouraged by the success of the Miami pilot project, the Big Bend BLN also applied to The Able Trust for an internship program, which will end in the summer of 2008. Currently, there are 27 internships in progress. Three internships have been completed; two (66%) of those interns were offered a permanent position.

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Workforce Florida also assisted the BLNs in funding a statewide pilot project that ended in February 2008. The Workforce Florida funding provided 40 internship opportunities; 11 (27%) interns were offered permanent positions. The Workforce Florida funding provided 40 internship opportunities. The breakdown is as follows: 24 Summer Internships (temporary) – 4 Permanent Positions Offered; 16 Regular Internships – 7 permanent positions offered (44 % of the interns secured jobs).

Due to the success of the program, the BLNs in cooperation with Wilson Resources, Inc. are seeking funding to launch an ongoing statewide BLN internship program.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE BLNS' INTERNSHIP PILOT PROGRAMS, FUNDED BY WORKFORCE FLORIDA, INC. AND THE ABLE TRUST:

1) Employers are more likely to employ people with disabilities, if they are reimbursed for the extra time needed to train workers with disabilities who have limited work experience. According to the *2003 American Community Survey*, 62.4 percent of Floridians with disabilities between the ages of 21-64 are unemployed, resulting in limited work experience. For example, after several years of being unemployed a young man was hired through the Miami Dade BLN internship pilot program. The employer noted that without the internship program this would not have been possible because the young man needed a lot of extra time and attention to learn the job. The internship program reimbursement made it possible for the employer to justify the extra expense.

2) The BLNs were key to the success of the internship pilot program. BLN members hired the interns or promoted the program in their local communities. This provided job leads that would otherwise have been unattainable.

3) The quality, types and variety of positions opened exceeded expectations. The internships were in banking; state offices; computer, cable and insurance companies; advertising, law and CPA firms; magazine publishing; health care; aviation; auto repair; law enforcement; retail; and a host of other organizations. Jobs people had only dreamed of were open to them for the first time.

4) Matching of interns and employers is crucial to ongoing employment success. Due to the efforts of volunteer and Big Bend BLN member Susan Dunbar, excellent matches were made in the Tallahassee area. This facilitated larger numbers of successful interns and satisfied employers.

5) Even when an individual did not secure a permanent position after the internship, he/she now had "paid" work experience, something nearly all employers demand when they are recruiting. Several interns who had temporary positions were able to find permanent work in the same field now that they had the requisite skills.

6) Many of the interns and a few of the employers recommended that the internships should last more than 240 hours.

7) Employers and interns were highly satisfied with the experience. The BLNs working with WRI made the application and invoicing processes simple. The forms were one-page. WRI regularly receives calls from employers asking if there is funding for interns with disabilities. The experience increased demand for workers with disabilities.

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8) Because the relationship with the employer was a direct one, the cost per internship was extremely low, on average less than \$2,500 per intern. Nationally, the average cost for supported employment is \$6,000.

9) The internship pilot project proved that employers representing a myriad of industries will hire, if compensated for the extra time needed to train a candidate with limited work experience.

10) Attitudes at all levels change when co-workers and managers have opportunities to experience well-matched qualified workers with disabilities in their workplaces.

LOCAL FLORIDA BLN ACTIVITIES 2007-08

BIG BEND BLN (Tallahassee Area):

Officers:

President: Sarah S. Butters, Holland and Knight LLP Law Firm

Vice President: Matt Hansard, Thomson Brock Cherry & Company CPAs

Chapter Highlights: In October 2007, the Big Bend BLN was awarded "Florida's BLN Chapter of the Year" by The Able Trust. On March 15, 2007, the employment of people with disabilities and the BLN were the topics of the Greater Tallahassee Chamber of Commerce's *Business Nuts and Bolts* event. Nearly 200 Chamber members attended. Matthew Brown, president of Premier Bank, the sponsor of Business Nuts and Bolts and one of the founders of the Big Bend BLN, introduced the session. Leslie Wilson provided an overview of the benefits of employing people with disabilities and Barbara Edwards, Comcast Cable, gave an employer testimonial. Comcast Cable was selected the 2006 United States Business Leadership Network "Employer of the Year" for its work with the Big Bend BLN and the ongoing employment of workers with disabilities. With the pro bono assistance of Holland and Knight Law Firm (HKLAW), the Big Bend BLN applied for and secured its federal charitable tax status. Shortly thereafter, the BLN applied for its own internship grant from The Able Trust and was awarded \$65,000. The pilot program targeted internships for 30 students and adults and will end in the summer of 2008. Thus far 22 interns have secured internships in atypical employment settings, thanks to the excellent matching conducted by Susan Dunbar, a BLN member and volunteer. The BLN also produced a video on the employment of people with disabilities.

FIRST COAST BLN (Jacksonville Area):

Officers:

President: John Wagner, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida

Vice President, Chris Oakley, Federal Reserve Bank

Secretary/Treasurer: Linda Plummer, Plummer & Associates

Chapter Highlights: Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida (BCBSF) has 7,000 employees on its main campus in Jacksonville and approximately 9,000 employees statewide. BCBSF hosted the BLN's successful August 31, 2006 Kick-Off keyed by former Governor Jeb Bush with 500 business and community

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leaders in attendance. BCBSF chairman and chief executive officer, Robert Lufrano, M.D., announced during the kickoff that due to spinal surgery in his teens, he had experience as a person with a disability who temporarily used a wheelchair. While others treated him differently during this time in his life, he maintained that he was always the same productive person he had been. Following the Kick-Off, BCBSF's Dr. Lufrano recommended that a committee be organized and chaired by Kathy Haskins, vice president Strategic Staffing and Human Resource Services, to determine how the company can become an "employer of choice" over the next two-three years for Floridians with disabilities. A Disability Awareness Team was organized and two of its members are BLN presidents, John Wagner in Jacksonville and Mayra Hernandez in Orlando. The company also encouraged its employees to become involved in local BLNs around the state. The organization has now hired a full-time person in Jacksonville to champion BCBSF's hiring of people with disabilities.

The BLNs Program/Education Committee chaired by Rosemary McMullan, a vice president with Merrill Lynch, developed the *Corporate Disability Leadership Workplace Assessment Tool* with input from Home Depot, BCBSF, CitiGroup and SunTrust Bank. This excellent tool assists companies in determining what they need to do to recruit, hire and accommodate customers with disabilities. It is being disseminated to all of the BLN members.

On May 8, 2008, Leslie Wilson presented *Turning Diversity into Dollars* at the Jacksonville Society for Human Resource Management one-day HR Conference through the efforts of the BLN's secretary/treasurer, Linda Plummer. The session generated a job lead and an appointment with a national transportation company to determine how it can recruit and hire people with disabilities.

The BLN learned in May 2008 that its federal tax exemption status was approved by the Internal Revenue Service. The BLN plans to submit an Able Trust grant application to launch its own internship program.

GREATER ORLANDO BLN (GOBLN):

Officers:

President: Mayra Hernandez, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida

Vice President: Jeannie Amendola, Walt Disney World Company

Secretary/Treasurer: John Mikolaczyk, Discovery Cove (SeaWorld)

Chapter Highlights: On September 24, 2007 the Greater Orlando BLN held its kickoff in conjunction with the United State Business Leadership Network annual conference. The successful event attracted 400 business and community leaders. Speakers were from the officers' companies and Workforce Florida, Kennedy Space Center, Lockheed Martin Corporation and the Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities. Sponsorships from BCBSF, Walt Disney World, SeaWorld, LYNX, High-Tech Institute and Albertsons raised approximately \$9,000.

In March 2008, BLN officers and members met at the Lockheed Martin campus to develop a strategic plan for 2008-09. The BLN will focus on employer training

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through strategic partnerships with the Chambers of Commerce and Societies for Human Resource Management and membership recruitment.

MIAMI-DADE BLN:

Officers:

President: Bob Bromberg, Bromberg & Associates

Vice President: Patrice Fike, University of Miami

Secretary/Treasurer: Bob Friedman, Holland and Knight LLP

Chapter Highlights: The Miami-Dade BLN has an Employer Awareness Campaign replete with 15 busboards roaming the city, posters that have been placed in offices, links to the BLN's website from area organizations' and employers' websites, and a video. The attractive campaign is raising Miami area employers' awareness of the untapped workforce -- people with disabilities. TMP Worldwide, formerly a division of Monster.com, is handling the BLN's marketing efforts and emphasizes the need for "reach and frequency. An entrepreneurial organization, the BLN sold the rights to its Employer Awareness Campaign to the state of Oregon for use in that state. The BLN has notified other states and organizations that the BLN will sell the rights to the campaign.

In November 2007, the BLN partnered with the Greater Miami Society for Human Resource Management to provide *Turning Diversity into Dollars...The Benefits of Hiring Workers with Disabilities*. More than 30 employers attended the training, which secured two hours of HRCI credits for human resource professionals.

The BLN secured a grant from the Able Trust for its pilot internship project. More than 55 percent of the program's participants secured permanent jobs. The cost per person hovered around \$2,500. The jobs secured were atypical. Best Buddies Jobs has reported a number of employment opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities as a result of connections made through the BLN.

The BLN is currently planning its October 29, 2008 Gala. Baptist Health South Florida and its President and CEO, Brian Keeley, will be recognized at the event for contributions to the employment of people with disabilities. The BLN hopes to raise \$50,000 or more to continue its efforts to open employers' doors.

POLK COUNTY BLN:

Officers:

President: Karen Mitchell, Lakeland Regional Medical Center

Vice President: Greta Dupuy, Publix Supermarkets, Inc.

Secretary/Treasurer: David Sorg, The Mosaic Company

Chapter Highlights: The Polk County BLN struggled for years to recruit new members, even after its highly successful kickoff event in January 2006. Finally Karen Mitchell, MBA and director, Compensation & Benefits for Lakeland Regional Medical Center, became the BLN president and champion. Since January 2007, the BLN has recruited 35 new "business" members and continues to grow with each meeting. The BLNs quarterly meetings focus on educating the BLN members. Cooperative trainings have been held with the Chamber of Commerce.

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After becoming involved with the BLN, Ms. Mitchell encouraged the hospital to hire a young man in the hospital's kitchen. He was so successful that shortly thereafter he was promoted. This led the hospital to hire one of the BLN's interns. This gentleman has also secured permanent employment. Ms. Mitchell announced at the October 2007 BLN meeting that if additional funding is found for the internship program, the Polk County BLN will use it all.

TAMPA BAY METRO BLN

Officers:

Chair: JoJo Ruby-White, SunTrust Banks

Vice Chair: Bob Haber, Hyatt Hotels

Secretary/Treasurer: Dani Limbach, Busch Gardens

Chapter Highlights: The Tampa Bay Metro BLN Kick-Off Event was held on February 26, 2008 at the Grand Hyatt Tampa Bay. Nearly 200 people attended the event. Tampa's Mayor Pam Iorio and Ron Rotella, executive director of the Westshore Alliance, one of Florida's largest business associations, spoke at the event.

Kick-off sponsors included: Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida, Enable America, SunTrust Bank, Grand Hyatt Tampa Bay, Jobing.com, Tampa General Hospital, AmeriGroup, Westshore Alliance, Greater Tampa General Hospital, Event Technologies, Hillsborough County, and the City of Tampa. Most of the sponsorships were donations of cash and some were in-kind.

Work is also progressing on the BLN's website, donated by Angela Rosario with JOBING.COM. (Website: www.tampabaymetro.blm). Ms. Rosario also donated a logo developed by a graphic artist with autism who has been adopted by other local BLNs (see newsletter masthead).

Ms. Rosario and Ms. Ruby-White presented the BLN and the employment of people with disabilities at a January 24, 2007 meeting of the Tampa area Recruiters Network Group (RNG). More than 30 people attended the event. Eladio Amores and Ms. Rosario also presented these topics at the February 20, 2007 Hispanic Chamber of Commerce meeting; 23 people attended. Mr. Amores presented *Disability Etiquette* to the management staff of the Tampa SunTrust office and staff of AmeriGroup.

DEVELOPING BLNs

BAY AREA BLN (Panama City Area)

Chapter Highlights: Rick Dye, city president of Regions/AmSouth Bank in Panama City, hosted a March 14, 2007 luncheon of local business people as a means of recruiting a core group of local, powerful leaders for the BLN. Irma Burden, also with the Naval Surface Warfare Center, attended and explained that the Department of Defense is strongly encouraging its local installations and vendors to recruit and hire people with disabilities.

Several representatives of the Human Resource Association of Bay County (HRA) attended and requested training for their members. Leslie Wilson

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presented the BLN and the employment of people with disabilities at the May 24, 2007 meeting of the HRA. Debbie Courtney presented the BLN and the employment of people with disabilities at the HRA of Bay County's monthly meeting held on September 20, 2007. Information was also provided on DMD activities. Following the presentation, two HRA of Bay County members expressed an interest in participating in DMD.

The BLN plans a summer 2008 training for employers on the benefits of hiring workers with disabilities.

FT. MYERS BLN

President: Erin Wilkinson, SunTrust Bank

Chapter Highlights: The Ft. Myers BLN has had several meetings that included training on best business practices. Representatives of SunTrust Bank, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida, the Florida Office of the Attorney General, the Lee County Visitor and Convention Bureau and the Career and Service Center of Southwest Florida met in May 2008 to plan a training program for local employers. The training scheduled for July 11, 2008 is titled, *Turning Diversity into Dollars*. Joan Altavilla, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida, will discuss her company's successful efforts to inexpensively accommodate existing, returning and new employees with disabilities and Eladio Amores will present legal and other issues related to the employment of people with disabilities. The training will provide 1.5 recertification credit hours for human resource professionals.

GAINESVILLE BLN

Chapter Highlights: On February 28, 2008, the Gainesville Area BLN co-hosted a diversity training session with FloridaWorks, Santa Fe Community College and North Central Florida's Society for Human Resource Management. The training was titled, *Turning Diversity into Dollars*. A job fair followed that afternoon. Twenty-eight individuals attended this excellent training session.

Eladio Amores presented legal and other issues related to the employment of people with disabilities, and Joan Altavilla, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida, discussed her company's successful efforts to inexpensively accommodate existing, returning and new employees with disabilities.

AvMed attended the February training and as a result it scheduled in April 2008 training sessions on hiring workers with disabilities for its employees in its north and south Florida offices. The company's CEO, Chief Legal Counsel and other high-ranking employees attended the training.

PALM BEACH BLN

Chapter Highlights: Don Chester, vice president St. Mary's Medical Center and a United Way member with an interest in the BLN, and Scott Badesch, president of the United Way of Palm Beach County, agreed to hold a meeting to recruit local business leaders. Mr. Chester and Mr. Badesch co-hosted a "BLN Breakfast Launch" on April 17, 2007 at the United Way offices. The Human Resource Association of Palm Beach County (HRA Palm Beach County) sent a

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representative and the Palm Beaches Chamber of Commerce shared the BLN's April 17th invitation with its members.

Nearly 25 people attended the breakfast launch and two subsequent speaking engagements on hiring people with disabilities were secured. On September 20, 2007, Melinda Boynton, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and member of the Palm Beach BLN, presented a speech titled, "Love Allen" and distributed BLN materials to Human Resource Association of Palm Beach County members. It is estimated that 120 HRA members attended this event.

Walgreens has a distribution center in Palm Beach County. WRI is working with Dana Lynch, Walgreens' Human Resource Manager in Jupiter, to establish training opportunities in the county.

- THE END -

Florida's Local Business Leadership Networks featured in this newsletter are affiliated with:

*The Able Trust Florida BLN www.abletrust.org;
and the United States BLN www.usbln.com.*

*Organized and Staffed by:
Wilson Resources, Inc.
"Social Entrepreneurs"*



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For more information on the local Florida BLNs featured in this newsletter, please call Debbie Courtney, Wilson Resources, Inc. at 850/386-2022 or email debbiec@wilres.com

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