

2016 Disability Awareness Committee Holds Annual Awards Ceremony

The Mayor-President's Awareness Committee for Citizens with Disabilities (ACCD) recognized community members who have improved the lives of those living with disabilities. Honorees were recognized at the ninth Annual Awards Ceremony held at the Heymann Park Recreation Center in Lafayette. A total of nine awards were given in various categories.



2016 Youth of the Year - Meet Melanie Jankower!

Melanie is literally a cheerleader for young people with disabilities since becoming the first member of the Ragin' Cajuns Cheer Team with Down Syndrome. Jankower inspires those who cheer with her and the fans who watch her and she has paved the way for other young people with disabilities to pursue their goals in the "normal world."



2016 Distinguished Merit, Individual – Paul Carter, co-owner/operator of Medical Advantage Care

Paul was presented with this award in recognition of his hands-on commitment to those that he serves by motivating individuals to “make their disability their ability.” Paul works tirelessly for those he serves, whether that means being a voice for the voiceless, providing assistance to those in need to make their daily lives a little easier, or helping those living with disabilities gain employment.



2016 Distinguished Merit, Organization – Lafayette Parish Sheriff's Office REHAB Program

REHAB is one of the most successful diversionary programs in the region, servicing 2,565 individuals since 2008 who suffer from mental health disabilities and substance abuse. In 2015 alone, 347 individuals were reintegrated into society with gainful employment and the tools to cope with addiction and mental health difficulties. (Pictured-Lacie Dunn, with the Lafayette Parish Sheriff's Office.)



2016 Educator of the Year Educator - Susan “Bet” Edney

For her commitment to disadvantaged students and for positively impacting the lives of those she serves and works alongside. Edney advocates for students struggling with medical, cognitive or learning issues who are often in difficult family or poverty situations. Her unending support of these children inspires colleagues to work together for the common good of all.



2016 Volunteer of the Year – Cody Krener

Cody volunteers up to 20 hours each week at UL LIFE and goes above and beyond to ensure university students lead a more independent lifestyle, feel accepted and are involved in daily campus activities.



2016 Employer of the Year – Louisiana Praline Factory

Louisiana Praline Factory utilizes the State Office of Rehabilitation Services as their primary source for filling vacant positions, treating their employees like family and rewarding hard work with pay increases. Employees feel that this was not only their last chance, but their only chance at becoming gainfully employed after seeking work for several years. Owner/Operators, Mr. and Mrs. Randy Broussard.



2016 Vickie Nettles Advocacy Award - Elden Marie Leger

Mrs. Marie, with Families Helping Families is determined to make Lafayette a better place for those living with disabilities, encouraging clients so they never lose courage, while also supporting them to become their own advocate or the voice for their children.



2016 Outstanding Individual with a Disability - Jamie Duplechine

Jamie is a true spokesperson for persons with disabilities and was named Ms. Louisiana Wheelchair 2015. Jamie uses this platform to advocate for those who may not have a voice and for those who may not yet realize their voice.



2016 Media Partner – Acadiana Open Channel

Represented by Executive Director Ed Bowie, AOC is a vital part of Acadiana's information infrastructure, provides timely support and promotion of community news and events, including coverage of news worthy events regarding disability issues.



Disability Awareness Month

Mayor-President Robideaux proclaimed October 2016 as Disability Awareness Month, stating “collectively as a community, we strive to break down barriers for our neighbors living with disabilities to access to the resources necessary to fulfill their desire to be a successful, contributing member of this community.” Here with Bambi Polotzola, Director of the Governor’s Office of Disability Affairs.



All 2016 award recipients were nominated through a community-wide, open submission process and ultimately chosen for their outstanding work by a selections committee.

The honorees' families, friends, colleagues and those who nominated them attended the luncheon to celebrate the recipients and their contributions in bettering the lives of the disabled community. All winning nominations were submitted for the 2016 State Gold Awards presented by the Governor's Office of Disability Affairs. This year, Lafayette Parish will be recognized for a record-breaking three GOLD Award winners at the State level: Louisiana Praline Factory, Employer of the Year; Jamie Duplechine, Outstanding Individual, and; Deborah Aymond for the Distinguished Merit Award.

The Awareness Committee for Citizens with Disabilities was established in 2007 to give a greater voice to citizens living with disabilities in Lafayette Parish. The committee's purpose is to serve in an advisory capacity to Lafayette Consolidated Government, and works to: develop and channel information regarding disabled persons to the citizens of the community through the introduction of special activities; work with all aspects of community life so that persons with disabilities will realize the rights and responsibilities afforded to all citizens; receive recommendations, requests, and citizen complaints regarding problems affecting the disabled and; help increase opportunities for employment for persons with disabilities.

For more information on the committee visit www.lafayettela.gov/dac .

