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**Saratoga Bridges celebrated National Disability Employment Awareness Month**

In October, Saratoga Bridges celebrated National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). First enacted in 1945, Congress passed a law declaring the first week in October each year "National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week" to educate the American public about issues related to disability and employment. In 1962, the word "physically" was removed to acknowledge the employment needs and contributions of individuals with all types of disabilities. In 1988, Congress expanded the week to a month and changed the name. The goal of the month is to increase the public's awareness of the contributions and skills of American workers with disabilities.

Saratoga Bridges welcomed the opportunity to be one of the 165 community rehabilitation agencies and private sector business partners to submit an individual for the William B. Joslin Award. They selected John Toker as he is most worthy to be nominated for this people-centered recognition from New York State Industries for the Disabled (NYSID). The Award was established in 2004 by NYSID's Board of Directors to acknowledge Joslin who was a pioneer and leader in the field of disabilities. It celebrates excellent vocational performance and personal successes of people employed on NYSID preferred source contracts. Certainly, John represents the ideal candidate.

John is an energetic, outgoing and very likeable young man who is always open to new experiences. He grew up in Albany, NY and graduated from Albany High School in 2011. John has been working in the Fire-Bag™ Firewood component of Alpha Industries since he graduated. For John, being hired for a job, learning to work and receiving a paycheck were his life's goals. The transition from school to work was challenging at first as his school environment was very structured. He needed to navigate some independence while at work. Fortunately, John has been extremely successful and has definitely blossomed.

Every day, John packages their own brand of packaged firewood that is kiln-dried to provide a warmer fire while eliminating pests that may inhabit green or seasoned wood. The firewood has Preferred Source Program status that meets New York State Department of Environmental

Conservation and State of Massachusetts specifications for moisture content and quality for campground purposes. They utilize high quality, dry, easy-to-start mixed northern hardwoods that are packaged in recyclable heavy-duty bags with carrying handles. Each bag contains one cubic foot of firewood, fire starter stick and kindling. After the wood is dried, it is placed in large metal cages. John's job is to take out pieces, fill a mesh bag, close it and carry it back to an empty wire cage for stacking, wrapping and shipping. In his position, John is most helpful to his Supervisor, enjoys his work and has done well in adapting to the demands of the job.

In addition, when Saratoga Bridges needed someone to deliver inter-office mail from building to building, John was chosen. Thrice a day he gathers mail for the other building, walks over, interacts with staff, puts the mail in the correct mail box and returns to the wood packing area. Further, the agency recently started a Lawn Care business to care for some of their community-based homes. John was assessed and will be a part of the crew, where he will make a prevailing wage. In every position, John is succeeding!

#### Background on NYSID:

For more than 35 years, NYSID – a not-for-profit member agency organization – has been meeting the purchasing needs of state and local government agencies while advancing employment for New Yorkers with disabilities. Under the legislatively-mandated New York State Preferred Source Program, NYSID acts as a "virtual storefront" for a statewide network of 165 community rehabilitation agencies and private sector business partners to employ skilled people with disabilities in production facilities and community-based jobs. Through more than 1,900 contracts that bring work to NYS communities, NYSID member agencies deliver quality goods and services at OGS-approved prices to fulfill individual government agency missions.

#### Background on Saratoga Bridges:

Saratoga Bridges has been providing the highest level of programs to people with developmental disabilities and their families for more than 55 years by promoting their abilities and achievements in every aspect of community life. As one of the largest private non-profit organizations in Saratoga County, they have been committed to ensuring that the individuals they serve are able to realize their goals, hopes and dreams as they work, shop, play, and volunteer while leading full, productive and contributing lives. This voluntary service provider believes that the care they give increases immeasurably the quality of life for every citizen. Saratoga Bridges' philosophy is that every day is full of possibilities!

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