



NEWS RELEASE

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2025 SRC Disability Employment and Inclusion Awards

Five Nebraska VR partners received awards for their role in creating inclusive workplaces and advocacy for disability employment.

The 2025 SRC Disability Employment and Inclusion Awards highlight the successful partnership between Nebraska VR and the businesses and communities they serve. Nebraska VR offers individualized programs to help people with disabilities find, keep, and advance in employment consistent with their interests, priorities, strengths, talents, and choices while working with businesses to find and keep quality employees.

"I am pleased to be part of this celebration of businesses and their partnership with Nebraska VR," said Lieutenant Governor Joe Kelly. "Nebraskans of all skills, talents, and abilities are needed to help our economy grow. These businesses deserve recognition for their leadership."

Nebraska Commissioner of Education Dr. Brian Maher also commended those receiving recognition. "These individuals and businesses have demonstrated strong leadership in providing opportunities for learning, earning, and living," said Dr. Maher. Nebraska VR staff members who work directly with students, clients, and businesses to have meaningful employment were also recognized.

"During October's National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), we are pleased to recognize four business partners and a Champion of Disability Employment," said Nebraska VR Director Lindy Foley. "The theme for NDEAM 2025 is 'Celebrating Value and Talent'. These awardees clearly embody those who recognize value and talent and who provide access to good jobs for individuals with disabilities."

The Nebraska State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Employment Committee selected the recipients from nominees submitted by Nebraska VR Business Account Managers and Employment Specialists. The awards are presented during October's National Disability Employment Awareness Month. The Council is comprised of individuals who have an interest in working with Nebraska VR to ensure the needs of Nebraskans who experience a disability are met in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

New Business Partner Recognition Award – Generations Daycare & Learning Center, Scottsbluff, Nebraska

A strategic outreach effort by Nebraska VR Business Account Manager Michael Enriquez for the Scottsbluff area initiated a successful partnership with Generations Daycare & Learning Center, owned by Sherri Williams. Leveraging insight from a Working in Nebraska (WIN) meeting, Nebraska VR focused its outreach on childcare providers in the Scottsbluff/Gering area.

Michael proactively “hit the pavement” to build connections and explore partnership opportunities with local businesses. The collaborative relationship began with Sherri welcoming a Nebraska VR client for a facility tour, followed by a coordinated On-the-Job Evaluation for the same individual. This newly forged partnership, though in its early stages, is marked by Sherri’s enthusiastic commitment to future collaborations including additional tours, On-the-Job Evaluations, and Work-Based Learning Experiences. The On-the-Job Evaluation concluded with a successful part-time employment offer from Generations Daycare which the client accepted. The client continues to thrive in this role, expressing appreciation for the opportunity, the strong supervisor-supervisee relationship with Sherri, and the supportive work environment. Generations Daycare & Learning Center’s willingness to move at a pace that met the client’s comfort and needs was instrumental in this successful placement.

Small Business Partner Recognition Award – Pizza Ranch, North Platte, Nebraska

The partnership with Pizza Ranch in North Platte was strong from the beginning. Manager Shae Caldwell and shift supervisors Myka, Leanne, and Kenna met with Employment Specialist Bobbi Belka before the franchise opened last year. Since then, they have shared their interview, orientation, and training practices so Nebraska VR staff can better understand their business needs. The business provides worksite tours, job shadows, and On-the-Job Evaluations and works to provide training for a variety of learning styles and any necessary accommodations. They are known for a willingness to “think outside the box” to meet the needs of job seekers while also satisfying the needs of the employees and customers. Pizza Ranch has hired five individuals as a direct result of this partnership. Among comments shared by those new employees are, “They gave me a chance when no one else would. I am still there and feel safe and am part of the family.”

Large Business Partner Recognition Award – Behlen Manufacturing Company, Columbus, NE

Behlen Manufacturing Company, headquartered in Columbus, Nebraska, has been in the metal fabrication industry for over eighty-five years. With more than one hundred employees, Behlen produces a variety of products including metal building systems, grain storage solutions, livestock equipment, and capacitor winding machines. Their commitment to excellence, innovation, and reliability is evident not only in their products, but also in their strong partnerships and community involvement. Behlen sets the standard for inclusive workplace culture by consistently supporting individuals with disabilities as they join the workforce. Their HR team plays a vital role in ensuring each client’s success through thoughtful onboarding, accommodations, and support. They actively provide tours, job shadows, informational interviews, and internships for Nebraska VR clients. Their team goes above and beyond to create roles that align with an individual’s abilities and needs, often making workplace accommodations to ensure each person can thrive. Their participation in business panels and events has been instrumental in training and informing Nebraska VR staff across the state. In the past year alone, Behlen has hired more than ten Nebraska VR clients, a testament to their belief in the potential of every person. Their willingness to mentor, train, and support individuals through multiple barriers exemplifies their commitment to workforce development and inclusion.

Large Business Partner Recognition Award – Pizza Ranch, Omaha, Nebraska

Pizza Ranch, with multiple locations throughout Nebraska and the Midwest, offers family style dining and entertainment to the community. They have partnered with Nebraska VR over the past four years offering Work-Based Learning Experiences, tours, On-the-Job Evaluations, and participated in the Project SEARCH Business Advisory Council (Omaha/Lincoln). Regional Manager Scott Parrill also serves on the State Rehabilitation Council. Pizza Ranch has provided twelve students with paid work-based learning opportunities and one volunteer work experience over the past three years at the Omaha location. Worksite skills trainers and Nebraska VR staff members shared Pizza Ranch management and staff are supportive, flexible, and inclusive. The company has hired Nebraska VR clients in permanent positions as well. In addition to their work to build an inclusive workplace, they engage in community philanthropic efforts including partnerships with the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, and Habitat for Humanity.

Champion of Disability Employment Recognition Award – Deb Schauer, Kearney, NE

Deb Schauer embodies the spirit of a **Champion of Disability Employment**. Her 30-year special education teaching career in Kearney, Nebraska coupled with three decades as a dedicated Special Olympics coach laid a strong foundation for her advocacy. Though retired from coaching and teaching, she continues to cheer on former athletes and students and has returned to Kearney Public Schools as a work site skills trainer for Project SEARCH at Mary Lanning Healthcare, focusing on preparing young adults with disabilities for competitive employment. Deb has an unwavering belief in the potential of every

individual. She provides vital assurance to parents and uses students' internship successes to build their self-confidence for the job search process. A key partner with Nebraska VR, Deb leverages her extensive community network to help students secure employment and foster positive relationships.

[Nebraska VR](#) is a state agency within the Nebraska Department of Education. Nebraska VR helps people who experience a disability prepare for, find, and keep a job while helping businesses recruit, train, and retain employees with disabilities.

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