

Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission

# NEWSNET



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Promoting employment of Ohioans with disabilities

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***You can't  
keep a  
good man  
down***

**McLaughlin back on the job in river town**

## After stroke, man returns to waste treatment plant

By Marirae Frankenfield, RSC marketing representative, and Trudy Sharp, RSC public information officer

Vocational rehabilitation brings creative problem solving to the many challenging situations encountered by people during their work lives. The positive attitudes of rehabilitation professionals, and employers as well, can bring hope to someone who has fears about the future. Kenneth (Doug) McLaughlin, an optimistic individual, appreciated the positive approach of the many professionals who encouraged him as he recovered from a serious heart attack, stroke and subsequent vision loss to return to work. "I let my first cardiologist go because he was kind of negative," McLaughlin recounted. "I needed someone optimistic."

McLaughlin was one of the first people hired at Von Roll WTI, a hazardous waste treatment plant, when it began operation during 1991 along the Ohio River in East Liverpool. He'd worked around large industrial machines all of his life, beginning with weapons maintenance when he was in the Air Force. Later, he enrolled in a machine trades program where he learned blueprint reading and machining skills. He followed that with experience building heavy equipment for the steel industry and a stint at a water waste treatment plant. "I had a lot of background in pneumatics and hydraulics," he said.

Needless to say, McLaughlin's experience and knowledge could be valuable to Von Roll, which hired him as a mechanic, then promoted him to control room operator. Eventually, he became an electrical instrumentation technician, maintaining the many in-

tricate systems that process hazardous waste. The work was physically demanding with McLaughlin sometimes climbing the stacks, the tallest taking him 111 feet from the ground.

On Memorial Day 2003, a severe heart attack changed everything. His treatment involved inserting stents in his arteries to keep them open. "They put stents in and there's a one percent change you can have a stroke. I was in the one percent," he explained. That stroke left him with a significant loss of his visual field, as well as some loss of strength and sensation on his left side. The heart attack ended his career in what was a physically demanding job, and the vision loss made a desk job look like an impossibility.

"[The heart attack] was serious enough that the doctors say I shouldn't have survived it," McLaughlin recalled. "The stroke was minor, but within a few days, I realized that I had lost some of my peripheral vision." His left vision in both eyes just doesn't exist. If he holds his hands out in front of him, he can see his right, but not his left. It's called hemianopsia.

He radically changed his life style to lower his risk of another heart attack, but assumed that his lost vision would keep him from going back to work. "The doctors told me that it was a desk and a computer for me, but with my vision loss, I didn't know how that was going to happen," he said.

McLaughlin began receiving disability payments from his company's insurance program when a back-to-work specialist, upon seeing his ophthalmologic report, referred him to the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission's Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired. In March of 2004, McLaughlin met with Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Tim Brust, who had McLaughlin evaluated

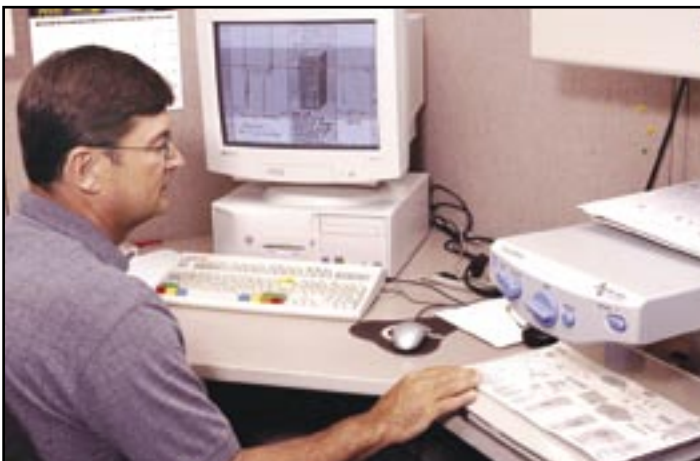


**Doug McLaughlin outside the Von Roll waste treatment incinerator. (Photos by Ron Groom)**

for computer skills and found that he tested well. Brust encouraged him to go to college, but McLaughlin was reticent to begin new studies at this point in his career.

McLaughlin had kept in touch with his coworkers at Von Roll including Karen Biscella, a human resource specialist. "When I told her about BSVI and that I was looking for job options, she thought there might be something for me to do there, even if only temporarily, to get me started in a work direction again," he reported. The company wanted him back. Biscella talked to others and came up with the idea of a data mapping specialist.

Data mapping involves reviewing plant processes and creating a visual depiction of the work flow. "You're taking what people do in their jobs day-to-day and putting it on paper, step-by-step," McLaughlin explained. "So you can look at a drawing and see what



people do in a certain function and how they fit into the big picture.”

Someone with McLaughlin’s varied background at the plant and familiarity with the systems would be perfect to accomplish the task. “Data mapping is something we’ve wanted to do for a long time, but none of us had the time to do it,” McLaughlin recalled. “I understand what I’m looking at on the drawings, where the data’s going, and what’s affecting what.”

The part-time desk job was created and BSVI helped with accommodations. Brust brought in Rehabilitation Technologist Darrell Slaybaugh of Canton to coordinate the technical aspects. McLaughlin must use VISIO, a computer drawing program to access flow charts, so Slaybaugh suggested ZoomText screen magnification/reader software, enabling McLaughlin to view an over all plan and then zero in on various parts to map them in ever-greater detail. The speech output capability of this adaptive software aids when he needs to review text. BSVI also purchased a closed circuit television (CCTV) to magnify hard copy drawings. Von Roll supplied a computer with a larger monitor.

There are still day-to-day problems with loss of peripheral vision such as running into people while he is walking. Half-open doors can be a real hazard, though he has learned to scan and use his hand. However, new optic technology in its experimental stage is helping meet those challenges. Brust referred McLaughlin to Cheryl Reed, an optometrist at United Disability Services in Akron. Through Brust and Reed, McLaughlin was signed up to participate in a study of a new “expansion prism” lens that could increase his visual field by 20 degrees. Sometimes called a Peli lens, after the Harvard doctor who originated the

concept, the new product was being developed by Chadwick Optical, Inc., an ophthalmic lens laboratory. As a study participant, McLaughlin wouldn’t have to pay for the \$600 glasses.

First, small plastic prisms were adhered onto his glasses. However, the technology has since evolved to embed the prisms into the lens. Prescribing and fitting the Peli lens is just slightly more involved than fitting a bifocal lens, according to Chadwick’s Web site. “It’s not as good as your own vision, but it lets me know if there’s something there,” said McLaughlin.

Although Brust coordinated the efforts of the many professionals who helped McLaughlin, he points out that he can’t take credit for this return-to-work success, “I’m just glad that I could find such talented individuals,” he said, referring to Slaybaugh and Reed, and adding others to the list: Ruth Bachman, a low vision therapist who suggested tools that can help on and off the job; and Brad Hale, president of Career Assessment Systems in Salem, who provided Doug with information that helped him choose his best vocational goal.

“When you have a consumer that is as motivated as Doug to return to work, the counselor’s job is made so much easier. It was a pleasure working with Doug,” Brust said. “He’s lucky to have an employer such as Von Roll that recognizes his talents, and knows the value of retaining dedicated employees.”

The community is also lucky. According to Raymond Wayne, PR specialist for Von Roll and friend of McLaughlin, “Besides bringing jobs to the area, we located on a brown field. The area had been contaminated by the previous tenant that went bankrupt and left the community with the



**From left: Using a CCTV, adaptive software and a larger monitor, Doug McLaughlin can view detailed drawings.**

**Experimental prisms on his glasses help McLaughlin get around despite Hemi-anopsia (loss of peripheral vision).**

**Systems Administrator Steve Emmerling (r), is pleased that McLaughlin has taken on the data mapping.**

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burden of cleaning it up. We not only brought jobs but we're cleaning up the contamination as well. It's a win-win for everyone."

McLaughlin acknowledged his luck, "I had a bad heart attack. I'm lucky to be alive. Once the cardiologist commented to me, 'You look a lot better in person than you do on this paper.' I've changed my life entirely, eating and exercising.

"The loss of vision is hard to deal with," he admits. "If I didn't have the vision problem, I could drive myself to work and I wouldn't be bumping into people or things." However, any negativity soon fades and McLaughlin again focuses on what he *can* do – build a deck on his lake home, go fishing and enjoy his grown daughters and two grandsons. "My wife, June, has been a help to me in that she doesn't allow me to just sit there."

He's also optimistic that he'll continue to add hours and tasks to his repertoire at Von Roll. "It's really good to get back with the people I've worked with for over ten years. Everyone has been so encouraging."

A positive approach is the common ingredient among all the collaboration that has helped McLaughlin continue to live and work. "I'm very lucky," he said, with his usual optimism, "By all rights, I shouldn't be here."

## Trujillo, DeWine elected to lead commission

Gwendolyn L. Trujillo and Karen M. DeWine, both of Cincinnati, were respectively elected chair and vice chair of the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission by fellow commissioners at the July 19 meeting.

Trujillo teaches American Sign Language at Lakota West High School in West Chester and is a nationally-recognized advocate on behalf of people who are deaf. During 2003, President Bush named her to the U.S. Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board. She was appointed to the commission in 1993, reappointed during 2000, and previously served as acting chair.

DeWine, appointed during 2003, is a certified public accountant and administrator of the Ohio Twine Company, a privately-held investment firm. She also manages the DeWine Family Foundation and Good Samaritan Clinic, a private foundation that provides medical services to underprivileged and underserved families.

## Will perseverance bring mental health parity?

*By Elizabeth Sammons, RSC legislative liaison*

"The best part of being a legislator is the breadth of the learning that takes place... There's so much out there that I had no clue existed... It's amazing!" said former legislator Lynn Olman, the excitement in his voice still evident after his decade of service to the Ohio House of Representatives.

As a new legislator in 1995, Lynn Olman (R-Maumee) had hopes of attaching his name to an issue that would "create a legacy and really make a difference." Even with 15 years as a Maumee City Council member behind him, he recalled saying to his House peer, Sally Perz of Toledo, "I'm just an insurance peddler; I don't know anything. I don't have any strong convictions about any single thing like you do." Reportedly she replied, "Don't go looking for it – it will find you."

"Mental health parity found me," Olman continued, adding with a touch of irony, "I didn't know how big it was going to be."

Olman was neither the first nor the last Ohio legislator to take up the cause of mental health parity (MHP), measures requiring insurance companies servicing small businesses to provide coverage to people with emotional or mental disorders the way they finance the medical needs of people facing physical illness. His interest was piqued when he attended a meeting of the Toledo chapter of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) early in his legislative career.

Afterward, his ideas started taking shape. "They touched on the issue of health insurance, on mental health parity or equal treatment for disease of the brain. I asked, 'Why aren't Republicans putting their arms around this issue, because if we believe in less government, not more government... in the power of the individual rather than the power of government... that

it's important for people to work and take care of themselves rather than having to become wards of the state, then Republicans should embrace this. People have to go on welfare to get insurance coverage. That costs all taxpayers money.'" He decided to join then House Democrat Charleta Tavares in 1995 as co-sponsor of her already active MHP bill.

Republicans were taken aback by this self-described "moderately-conservative Republican" insurance agent



**Former Ohio Rep. Lynn Olman of Maumee was called a "mental health hero" for championing a bill in the legislature which would've required insurance companies to cover treatment for mental issues the same way they do physical illness. Denied this legacy and subsequently term-limited, he's passed the torch. (Photo by Joe Dunn)**

making a move that looked like bad news for insurance companies like his own. The party chided him. "I was told, 'Don't you know that you don't sign on with Democrats? We don't help them and they don't help us!'" he recalled.

While Olman's business had connected him with five chambers of commerce, it was this group that most opposed the idea of MHP.

William Fitzgibbon, director of the Ohio Small Business Council and health care lobbyist for the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, explained his organization's position. "When the government imposes what they feel is right... sometimes that doesn't