

## IOI awards given at dinner

Reprint from Cherokee Scout - September 30, 2015

IOI's Vocational Evaluator Work Adjustment Coordinator, Dennis Myers presented two Disability Awareness Awards at the Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce annual dinner on Sept. 22.

Myers said the theme of the awards was "My Disability is One Part of Who I Am," and recognized that October is not only Disability Employment Awareness Month but also marks the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

"Disability is an important perspective that these folks bring to the table, but it is not the only one," Myers said. "Statistically, persons with disabilities are about four times more likely to be unemployed than persons without disabilities. This adds perspective as we celebrate ones who have overcome disability to achieve employment."

Samantha Loudermilk, who recently joined Industrial Opportunities as an Employment Specialist, was able to present the first award to her mother, Von Loudermilk.

Von began receiving assistance from vocational rehabilitation in 1998, following her first rehabilitation in 1998, following her first back surgery. She was assisted with her education, beginning at Tri-County Community College and then transitioned to Western Carolina University. During this time, she had a second back surgery and the assistance continued until she reached her educational goal of acquiring a degree in Elementary



Ryan Revock/Cherokee Scout  
Von Loudermilk (right) received an award for overcoming barriers to employment from her daughter, Samantha at the Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce 45th Annual Dinner.

Education. She related that without vocational rehabilitation's help, her goal would have been much more difficult to achieve, Myers said.

The second individual award went to Sonia Rhodes, who also received Vocational Rehabilitation services and participated in the vocational training program at Industrial Opportunities. She was placed on a job at Big D in Marble and job coached in food prep. This coaching occurring in 2005 and she is still employed with expanded duties at Big D, Myers said.

The employer of the year award went to Cherokee County Schools, and the award was accepted by Superintendent Jeana Conley.

"Many people have been given employment opportunities and also opportunities to advance, with one award recipient having advanced from the classroom to a Principal's position," Myers said.

## NCARF Awards Luncheon

The North Carolina Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (NCARF) held its annual conference and awards luncheon in Greensboro, NC on October 1, 2015. Each year, nominations from all member program across the state are submitted and winners are chosen. Community rehabilitation programs are a unique combination of vocational rehabilitation programs, a job placement agency, and a business.

Mr. and Mrs. Tom and Susan O'Brien were named the recipients of the inaugural Christopher Thomas O'Brien Award. It is a community inclusion award and is presented to someone who goes above and beyond to ensure that an individual or individuals with special needs are included in the community to the fullest extent to their ability. The award was introduced and presented by George Marshall and received, with great humility, by Tom O'Brien on behalf of his wife and himself. It is named in memory of their son, Christopher Thomas O'Brien, whom Tom said continues to be a great inspiration in his life.



### A GIFT WORTH GIVING

IOI continues to experience challenging times! The cuts in our State funding, and the decline of the military and commercial manufacturing contracts. Both of these revenue sources (manufacturing contracts and program contracts) are vital to the funding of the vocational training programs IOI provides. Annually IOI serves approximately 100 adults with a disability.

Over the years, it has become an increasing challenge for IOI to develop a manufacturing business to off-set the unfunded services. The manufacturing division of IOI has always had to off-set the shortfall of state funding needed to support our mission "working with adults with disabilities to achieve employment".

IOI is asking that you prayerfully consider a donation to IOI. Solicitation of donations is something that should have been more proactive as the funding cuts continued to create a larger burden on our manufacturing operations. IOI has always been as independent as possible with about 85% of its revenues coming from manufacturing.

In considering this request, any amount that is placed on your heart would be a great benefit to the mission work IOI performs in Cherokee, Clay, and Graham counties. IOI is a non-profit 501C3 so any and all donations are tax exempt. All donations are to be used to support program services.

**Wishing you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!**

## U.S. senator takes tour of IOI plant

Re-print for The Andrews Journal - By: James Budd / Photo: Ryan Revock/



U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis (R-N.C.) met with Tom O'Brien, President and CEO of Industrial Opportunities, Inc., and Ross Johnson, President of IOI's main partner, Tactical Medical Solutions, Inc., in support of a White House security initiative that will heighten the needs for the partner's products.

O'Brien said Tactical Medical Solutions - which pumps about \$4.5 million into the economies of Cherokee, Clay and Graham counties through manufacturing at IOI—recently was appointed to the corporate roundtable. The initiative likely will broaden awareness of the need of products like those produced by the company.

"The aim of this effort is to launch a national public awareness campaign," O'Brien said. Tactical Medical Solutions' founder, Ross Johnson, said his company was founded in 2003, when after three tours in Afghanistan he saw firsthand the need for enhanced tourniquets and trauma supplies to save lives.

A former Green Beret, Johnson said he and a buddy formed the company in a garage in Fayetteville in an attempt to create supplies to minimize the deaths and injuries caused by improvised explosion devices by U.S. troops in the Middle East.

The tactics and equipment can be applied to both military and civilian uses.

There is a vital window of six to seven minutes to staunch the bleeding of armed forced personnel after and explosion. The

company, through IOI, products, including trauma kits, used by the military, emergency personnel and law enforcement produced at the local plant.

The privately held company has been a huge success, and today is one of the largest suppliers of medical products and trauma kits in America.

"We were a couple of guys in a garage who got lucky," Johnson said.

O'Brien said the partnership is vital to IOI's total economic benefit in the tri-county area, which exceeds \$15.7 million.

Tillis said his office will do everything possible to help veterans and industry in North Carolina.

"We want to make sure help for every industrial opportunity will be available for every North Carolinian," he said.

Tillis, who serves on the Senate Armed Services Committee, toured the plant with a host of dignitaries, including State Rep. Roger West (R-Peachtree), Cherokee County Commissioners C.B. McKinnon and Cal Stiles; County Manager Randy Wiggins; Economic Development Director John Carpenter; Greg Nazerian with Snap-On Tools; plus Bill Vespasian and Paul Worley with Tri-County Community College.

## IOI President lobbies for jobs

By James Budd - Cherokee Scout

The President and CEO of Industrial Opportunities Inc. has been quietly lobbying the state's congressional leaders to implement a two-year moratorium on a federal law that could force 85 workers at the local plant to lose their full-time work status.

IOI President Tom O'Brien met privately with U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis (R-N.C.) on Thursday after a tour of the plant with officials from its biggest vendor, Tactical Medical Solutions Inc.

The meeting with Tillis came on the heels of a Monday sit-down with U.S. Rep. Mark Meadows (R-N.C) of Cashiers) to discuss the impact of the federal Workforce Investment Opportunities Act, which goes into effect next year. O'Brien said he had "grave concerns" about how the WOIA Rules Committee's actions may affect "intellectually and developmentally challenged" workers in Andrews. About 85 of the company's 315 workers are disabled. "We are concerned about it at this point," he said. "About 85 people would be denied the ability to work."

O'Brien said the meetings with both Tillis and Meadows were productive. Tillis texted the issue back to his Washington staff as he was meeting officials here. "The senator immediately responded to the issues we raised by contacting his staff in his Washington office, as were ex-

plaining the WIOA impact on IOI people," O'Brien said. IOI is the second-largest manufacturer in the tri-county area, with an economic impact of \$15.7 million.

O'Brien said the WOIA Rules Committee is pushing the legislation in areas beyond what Congress intended when approving the legislation. If the rules are



adopted, it would restrict or eliminate commensurate wages for people with severe disabilities and limit full-time employment for disabled workers at any wage.

O'Brien said this will take effect next July, and he's hoping for a two-year hold to review the impact. He would like to see a data-driven study to determine if the recommended changes are in the best interest of people with disabilities.

"If the data determines there is a better model and alternative options for people to work in their community, we would like it to be identified," O'Brien said.

"We would like to see a cost-benefit analysis and give the individual, their families and caregivers the choice to work where they chose to work."

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### Mission Statement

We believe that individuals have a right to economic opportunity and personal development. The Board of Directors and staff actively incorporate the concept that through meaningful, satisfying work, people are able to live more independently, successfully, and productively. We believe that every individual has the right to respect, equal opportunity and gainful employment.

# MARC Annual Awards Luncheon & Art Exhibition

On October 27, 2015, The Marketing Association of Rehabilitation Centers (MARC) held their annual Awards Luncheon and Art Exhibition at the Lake Junaluska Assembly. Tom O'Brien received the 2015 Chairman's Award on behalf on his son, Christopher Thomas O'Brien. The plaque read, "In Memory of a Leader of Leaders Who Served Well to Improve the Lives of Others."



## *In Memory of Christopher Thomas O'Brien (1991 - 2014)*

For anyone who had the privilege of meeting Chris O'Brien you would not need to read nor question the following comments. Chris impacted anyone who ever met him and those who had the opportunity to be a part of Chris' life became a friend to him. Many words describe Chris...inspiring, uplifting, honest, loyal, true and without question, loving.

Chris impacted the lives of teachers throughout his school years and he would continue to go back and visit with them. Chris loved sports and was a fan of football, basketball, car racing and definitely baseball. So often his dad would take him to high school

football games, college basketball and Asheville Tourist baseball games. Chris was a UNC Tarheel fan, a UNC Asheville Bulldog fan and a Tourist baseball fan.

Whether going to get tacos on Friday or pizza on Saturday or to the bank to deposit his paycheck on payday, Chris had an impact on everyone he met. Without question, Chris O'Brien not only inspired people where he worked and in the community where he lived but throughout the region as he enjoyed life as it should be while so positively affecting the lives that he touched.

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- In memory of Christopher O'Brien by Kenneth & Jean Baker
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- In memory of Christopher O'Brien by Roy & Daphne Sargent
- In memory of Christopher O'Brien by his parents, Tom & Susan O'Brien
- In memory of Christopher O'Brien by Parker & Reichman, Inc.
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