

OOD Recognizes National Disability Employment Awareness Month with Job Fairs, Business Videos and Awards

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COLUMBUS, OH- National Disability Employment Awareness Month is an annual awareness campaign that takes place each October with the purpose of educating the public about the value of hiring individuals with disabilities and celebrating their many and varied contributions. This year's theme is *Inclusion Drives Innovation* and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) is leading efforts across the state to promote the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities. Specifically, the agency is hosting job fairs that are designed to connect OOD job seekers with employers; launching a video series to educate employers on the value of hiring individuals with disabilities; and recognizing employers who are committed to an inclusive and diverse workforce.

"Awareness about the business benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities has evolved," said Executive Director Kevin L. Miller. "For decades we had a business culture where individuals with disabilities were treated differently and only hired for certain types of jobs. We are changing that in Ohio. Last year, we assisted nearly 6,000 individuals with disabilities to successfully find employment."

During October, OOD will host its fifth annual series of job fairs for OOD job seekers and employers that are specifically looking to hire individuals with disabilities. The job fairs, held in Cincinnati, Columbus, Toledo and Cleveland, will provide individuals with disabilities a unique opportunity to connect one-on-one with employers. This year, more than 200 employers, 94 of which are first time participants, have registered to take part in these events.

Miller says that hiring employees with diverse abilities strengthens businesses, increases competition and drives innovation. "I've heard people say that OOD is the best kept secret in state government. However, we want to be known as the best option for individuals with disabilities and that we have helped employers find dependable, qualified workers."

OOD will premiere a series of short business videos on October 11th that highlight the many benefits of a partnership with the agency. For employers, these videos will provide a window into the many advantages of hiring individuals with disabilities, including workforce and financial resources, disability awareness training opportunities, recruitment and retention of individuals with disabilities, as well as valuable employer peer-to-peer networking opportunities through the 120-plus member Ohio Business Leadership Network.

Finally, the annual OOD Opportunity Awards will recognize and honor businesses that hire individuals with disabilities. Awards will be presented for Champion of Opportunity (businesses that have gone above and beyond to build a diverse workforce); Committed to Opportunity (businesses with a proven commitment); and Creating Opportunity (businesses that recently started hiring OOD job seekers).

OOD is the state agency responsible for assisting individuals with disabilities to gain meaningful employment, to live independently or receive disability benefits through the Social Security Administration. www.ood.ohio.gov

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