

# Disability Awareness Month

Congress designated each October as National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). It began in 1945 when Congress enacted a law declaring the first week in October each year National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week. 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 to National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

There are 30 million working-aged adults with disabilities. About half are classified as nonsevere. 90 percent of them want to work and the Social Security Administration estimates that 70 percent can work full-time. Nearly 19 percent of the U.S. population between 15 and 64 years old has a disability. Slightly more than 41 percent of those with a mental disability are employed. Of those who have difficulty seeing, nearly 44 percent are employed.

## **Jason Kingsley**

Jason Kingsley has proven that Down syndrome is not a roadblock to achievement. Although people with Down syndrome take more time to learn, they can and do learn. Kingsley benefitted from early intervention techniques and his accomplishments have continued to add up. At 19, Kingsley co-authored Count Us In: Growing Up With Down Syndrome with Mitchell Levitz. He acted on TV in shows like *All My Children* and *The Fall Guy*. Contradicting every stereotype of Down syndrome, Kingsley is multilingual and plays violin and piano. Today, he is a career employee in county government in New York state.

## **Nannie Sanchez**

Sanchez won 38 percent of vote in New Mexico Board of Education race in 2000. In doing so, she became the first person with Down syndrome to run for public office in the U.S. As a child, her mother had to sue to get her mainstreamed into public schools with other students then sued to get her into college even though she passed the entrance exam. She would later graduate and now is self employed as motivational speaker and works for New Mexico state government.

## **Kellie Lim**

In spring 2007, Kellie Lim entered history books as the first triple amputee to earn a medical degree. She graduated from UCLA's medical school with plans to focus on childhood allergies and infections disease. She will complete her residency at UCLA Medical Center. Lim was raised by her blind mother and became an amputee as a child when meningitis claimed her legs and arm. She also lost three fingertips on her remaining hand. At the time, doctors had given her a 15 percent chance of survival. However, five months after the amputations, Lim returned to school. Lim manages to perform most medical procedures -- including giving injections and taking blood -- with one arm. She walks on a pair of prosthetic legs. (based on an Associated Press article)

## **Bob Love**

Robert Earl (Bob) Love grew up in the segregated South in a troubled household. His stutter made him the target of an abusive stepfather and the taunts of children at school. Eventually moving in with his grandmother, she consoled him saying, “Robert Earl, there are no perfect people in this world. People are not always nice about things that they don't understand. You can talk or do anything else you want to do in your life, as long as you work hard and believe in yourself. Find yourself a dream and always hold on to it.”

He excelled in school and athletics and graduated from Southern University with a bachelor of science degree in food and nutrition. He was drafted in the fourth round by the Cincinnati Royals,

but he did not make the team. He played basketball and, to make ends meet, he worked at a hospital.

He made the Royals in 1966, and after two seasons, the Milwaukee Bucks selected him in the expansion draft. He played well, but he was told he had no future with the team because he did not communicate well. He ended up with the Chicago Bulls, making the All-Star team three times. A back injury ended his career in 1977. A bitter divorce left him nearly penniless. His wife left him taking the furniture, his rings and their joint bank account. She left a note saying, "I don't want to be married to a stutterer and a cripple."

Afterwards, Love could find only menial jobs. He found that anything else required the ability to speak clearly. He became a dishwasher and a busboy in a restaurant in a Nordstrom's department store. After some time of excellent work performance, he was offered a promotion only if he learned to speak more clearly and easily. Fortunately, Nordstrom would pay for the therapy. Love threw himself into speech therapy and after a year and a half was able to talk with little speech impediment and earned the promotion to become the head of Nordstrom's health and sanitation for the 150 restaurants nationwide.

His life continued to take a different spin. In 1988, he was promoted again and became Nordstrom's corporate spokesman. In 1991, Love was invited by the Chicago Bulls to return and become their director of community affairs. Love makes 300 to 400 speeches a year in schools, churches, hospitals and community centers. (based on a *Chicago Tribune* article by Ira Berkow)