October 14, 2010

**Employment Program Benefits Disabled Adults and Employers**

CLEVELAND, OH – October is National Disability Employment month, and at a time when many people in northeast Ohio are having trouble finding suitable work or any employment at all, Robert Harmon is happy to be working at a job he loves. Since 2005, Harmon has been employed at the Giant Eagle in Westlake; bagging groceries, collecting shopping carts and helping out wherever he can. To create a perfect-fit for Harmon, who has developmental disabilities (DD), Giant Eagle worked with REM Ohio, a service provider to adults with DD that facilitates finding job opportunities and supporting individuals upon community employment.

“It feels good to work in a place where you get to know the customers and they get to know you,” said Harmon. “I like to walk, so standing on my feet all day while I’m working is not hard to do at all.”

The vast majority of people with disabilities do not work. According to the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics for May, the percentage of people with disabilities in the labor force was 22.3. By comparison, the percentage of people with no disability in the labor force was 70.1.

“Adults with disabilities such as Down syndrome, autism, and learning deficits, in my professional experience, tend to be hard-working, good-hearted and have excellent attendance,” according to Wendy Conklin, Harmon’s REM Ohio residential supervisor. “Some special accommodations may be necessary, but with proper instruction and supervision, being employed in a community setting is beneficial to both the worker and the employer.”

Undoubtedly, many employers may worry that employing a worker with a disability may be fraught with pitfalls. They may worry about making expensive or time consuming accommodations. Or may be concerned about the disabled individual’s interactions with coworkers (and vice versa) or how reliable he or she may be as an employee. These may be legitimate initial concerns, however employing a person with disabilities can be a win-win situation for everyone involved.

Additionally, wage and tax incentives are available to employers to encourage employment of workers with disabilities from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). After an employee has worked 400 hours, the company is eligible to receive a tax credit of 40 percent of the disabled employees first $6,000 in wages. If the worker leaves employment, but has worked at least 120 hours, the employer remains eligible for a prorated tax credit of 25 percent.

“Robert is a good employee and he does his job well,” said Karen Glowacki, front end manager of the Westlake Giant Eagle. “He is a real team player.”

If you are an employer in northeast Ohio and would like to discuss the possibility of providing employment to an individual with disabilities, please call REM Ohio’s regional office located at 9775 Rockside Road, Suite 200 in Cleveland at 216.642.5339.

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**About REM Ohio Inc.**

REM Ohio Inc., is a partner of The MENTOR Network, serves adults with varied and often complex developmental disabilities. Headquartered in Akron, Ohio and with regional offices in Akron, Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati, the company’s programs and supports are built around the unique needs of each individual they serve and designed to promote independence, skill development, personal choice and growth in the communities where they live, work and play.