David Altstatt, independent vendor

David Altstatt Sr. graduated from the Oklahoma School for the Blind in 1974, and after a year of college, he was ready to get to work.

A past BEP vendor gave him that opportunity by opening the door to both a job and the BEP program. He said he used the opportunity as a foundation for his life.

Altstatt has worked with the BEP program for 40 years, and through those four decades has managed 24 different locations. He now manages vending services at Oklahoma City's Children's Hospital.

For a new OSB graduate, Altstatt said the help of BEP can be instrumental in securing their future.

"It was important for me," he said. "I believe it was helpful because it helped me learn a trade and helped me financially. It helped me mature and has helped me through life."

Altstatt said to be successful though, a potential BEP vendor must have drive.

"BEP provides a good opportunity for somebody to be self-motivated and who is concerned about self-preservation and does not want to be dependent on the state," he said. "I have enough time in that I could retire but I don't want to. You are restricted with some things in life (because of the disability) but this allows you to be a productive citizen in your community."

BEP
ENTREPRENEURS ON THE RISE
BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM
DRS

For more information,

contact BEP at (405)523-4800

http://www.okdrs.gov/drupal/job-seekers/bep

DRS Pub. #15-16 Date: October 2015

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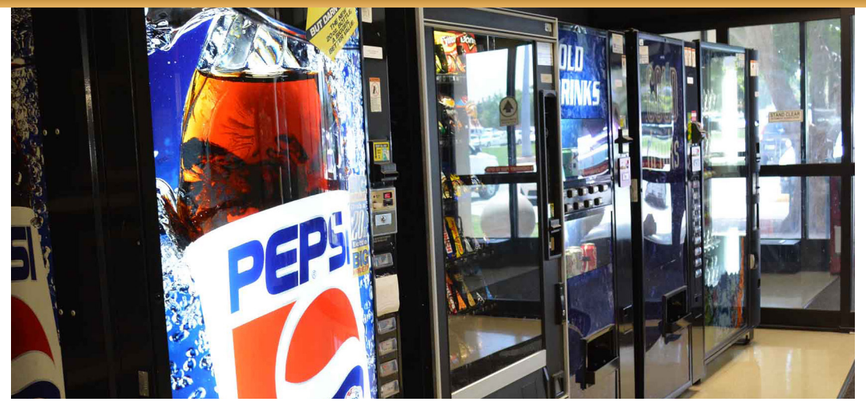
Assisting legally blind entrepreneurs to establish businesses in the food service industry

Business Enterprise Program

DRS

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION SERVICES



Welcome to the Business Enterprise Program

Through the federally enacted Randolph-Sheppard Act of 1936 and Oklahoma State Statute Title 7, the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services (ODRS), Division of Visual Services, operates the Business Enterprise Program (BEP). The BEP mission is to provide employment opportunities for people who are legally blind by establishing food service operations across the state.

These operations may consist of vending machine routes, cafeterias, or a variety of different types of snack bars. To accomplish this, the BEP aids entrepreneurs by providing extensive business training, licensing business owners, locating and equipping locations, securing initial inventory, and offering on-going business consultation services. BEP entrepreneurs are educated in the areas of food safety, hospitality, marketing, and business management. A portion of each business' proceeds is paid to ODRS to help support the program.

Success through BEP

Independent Contractor Rob Brown, left, with BEP Business Consultant Charles Pride, right.

Rob Brown, independent vendor

Rob Brown completed his BEP training in 1999 and began working with the BEP program as an employee at the Claremore veteran's center. Fifteen years later, Brown manages the food service contract at Fort Sill Army Post in Lawton. He oversees more than 400 employees who serve up to 15,000 meals a day to soldiers.

Brown recommends the BEP program to anyone who is blind and has an entrepreneurial spirit.

Brown has an associate's degree in Marketing and Management from OSU Okmulgee and a bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Langston University.

"It gave me an opportunity to provide for myself and family," Brown said. "It is a great opportunity for entrepreneurship and allows a blind person to actually achieve the American Dream to open their own business and be financially stable. It is not for everyone. It is not a throwaway program. It is a great opportunity."

Brown, who is married and has three children, also oversees food service at the Oklahoma state Capitol building.

Aletha Wright, independent vendor

Aletha Wright knows the BEP program has made a difference in her life. Growing up in Stilwell, Wright said her father, who was blind, struggled to find work. When he learned about a vending program for the blind, he moved his family close to Oklahoma City and went through the training.

Wright went through the program in 2003 and for the last nine years has overseen the snack bar and vending machines at the Oklahoma Department of Transportation.

"They gave me employment," she said. "The reason I am a success, and I am still here is because of the talents God gave me. A lot of business owners wish they had the backing of the BEP. They buy your first inventory and get you set up. You do pay it back, but it is a minimal amount with no interest."

She said the bottom line is a person must to want to be successful.

Wright said she believes those who never leave their home face a downhill ride.

"The job is better than staying at home if you have the ability to deal with people," she said. "People lose their self-worth and lose respect for themselves because they are not contributing to their families and their communities."