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**Communications Office**  
**News Release**

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**Vocational Rehabilitation Shares Inspiring Success Story In Light of the Holidays**

*The holiday season is about giving thanks and [Vocational Rehabilitation of Florida](#) is thankful for being able to touch the lives of many. Committed to helping people with disabilities find meaningful careers, Vocational Rehabilitation shares an inspiring success story of Nikki Wouralis who continues to inspire her co-workers with her drive to succeed.*

While driving on the highway early one morning in Massachusetts, Nikki Wouralis was involved in an accident that left her paralyzed from the waist down. However, Nikki faces each new day with a positive attitude and the strength of mind of someone thankful to be alive. "If it had gone a different way," she says. "I might not be here right now."

Although the accident changed her body, it didn't slow down her determination or motivation to succeed. After her family moved to Florida, Nikki came to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) ready to continue with her career plans.

"Nikki is so motivated," says her VR counselor Michael McMahon. She first came to VR when she was attending Brevard Community College full-time and was looking for a part time job to help pay for school. That is when Mike asked her "When do you want to start focusing on a career?"

After talking over different career choices and creating a plan, Mike sent Nikki to the Brevard Leadership Network and they signed her up for On-the-Job Training (OJT) with the Florida Institute of Technology (FIT) Human Resources Department.

On-the-Job Training is a VR program where employers train potential employees and give them the opportunity to experience working in an actual job setting. VR pays the employee's salary during OJT, along with any accommodations needed. It's a win-win situation for both employers and employees.

The OJT gave Nikki the hands-on experience she needed to learn the job's responsibilities. Nikki trained for six months and during that time she caught the eye of Joni Oglesby, Ph.D., Vice President for Support Services.

Joni was in need of an administrative assistant and knew that Nikki would be a perfect fit so she hired her in June 2011. "She did such a great job there; I knew she would do a good job here," says Joni.

It was Nikki's willingness to go the extra mile that made her stand out during her OJT. When a busy schedule left Joni with little time to prepare a presentation for a meeting, Nikki volunteered to create a PowerPoint for her. Joni was impressed by Nikki's outstanding PowerPoint, and also by the prepared talking points Nikki had included. "I looked at her talking points and it was much better

presentation,” said Joni, who was amazed at how thorough Nikki had been. “That’s what made me think she would be a great administrative assistant for me.”

Nikki has won over her boss with her attitude and work ethic. “Nikki has made a huge difference to the university and to me,” says Joni. “She is the most positive person I’ve ever met. She’s very realistic, down to earth. She knows what she wants out of life and she’s not sitting back waiting for someone to give it to her.”

Nikki was recently promoted and is now the administrative assistant for the entire Human Resources department.

As a benefit of being an FIT fulltime employee, Nikki can attend classes at FIT for free. She earned her associate’s degree at Brevard Community College and is now pursuing her bachelor’s degree at FIT. Nikki says she loves her job in Human Resources because as a business major, she can gain necessary experience that will help her in the future. She hopes to eventually become an HR Manager.

Nikki says that while her accident changed her life, it didn’t change her. “It definitely gave me a different outlook on life and made me appreciate it a little more,” she says. “I’m also happy to say that I’m driving again just four years after my accident.” She is grateful to VR and Mike for giving her the support and confidence to achieve her dreams. “VR made that transition a lot more comfortable for me,” she says. “I don’t know if I would have been able to do it on my own.”

If your business would like to participate in the On-the-Job Training program, contact your local VR office at (800) 451-4327 or visit [Rehabworks.org](http://Rehabworks.org) for a list of offices near you.

About Vocational Rehabilitation:

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is a federal-state program that helps people who have physical or mental disabilities get or keep a job. VR is committed to helping people with disabilities find meaningful careers. Our employer-focused website, <http://www.FLJobConnections.com>, allows businesses to search at no charge for employees who are ready to go to work, as well as to post available jobs. VR has 80 offices across Florida, and last year helped 6,523 Floridians with significant disabilities find or keep a job. For more information about VR and its services, call (800) 451-4327 or visit <http://www.Rehabworks.org>.

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REMINDER FOR MEDIA--When reporting on stories about people with disabilities, remember to use language that puts the person first, rather than the disability. For example, use phrases such as "people with disabilities" (instead of "the disabled") and "person who uses a wheelchair" (rather than "wheelchair bound"); and "people with a mental illness" (rather than "the mentally ill").