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**News Release**

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### **VR Assists Cole in Starting Small Business**

**Ocala, FL**-Just four years ago Shannon Cole was cruising the roadways in his semi, traveling the country- it's the job he loved and planned to have until he retired. Then one day he realized his plans were quickly coming to a halt, "I started having issues walking and with my balance, it started to be more dangerous than it was productive for me to drive 18 wheelers. I couldn't do it anymore because of the reaction time in my legs."

Shannon was feeling the effects of his disability, multiple sclerosis or MS, a debilitating neurological disease that interferes with the signals that the nerves send to the rest of the body. He decided he wouldn't let his disability keep him from living life to its fullest, "What I needed to do was find out what I had to do to make money to support my family, and I just fell back on what I knew."

What Shannon knew was the irrigation business, but he needed help with his business plan and finding the capital to get his idea off the ground. That's where Vocational Rehabilitation or VR came in. Shannon's mother-in-law told him about the services offered through VR to help people with disabilities find employment, "Without VR I wouldn't be where I'm at right now, period there are no if's, and's or but's about that. It is awesome."

Shannon partnered with his VR counselor, Candice Stoutamire, to get his new irrigation repair business, Ecogation, off the ground and running. "We first helped him with a business plan," says Candice. "We also helped him with a trailer to store his equipment, with uniforms, business cards, website hosting and a computer."

She knew he was driven to be successful, "He was awesome, really encouraging. He would always talk about setting an example for his children so they will be successful. He understood it was going to be hard work starting it [the business] and he put in the work."

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It's been three years since Shannon started his business, and he says there's no doubt his venture is successful. "I get at least three or four calls a week. As soon as the grass starts growing, the phone starts ringing."

He attributes his success to VR's help and to his creative sales tactics, "Eight out of 10 estimates I get, either I win them over with my charm or my prices are right." Shannon is thrilled that VR helped him create a successful business he could only have dreamed of that last day he climbed out of his 18-wheeler.

Florida's Vocational Rehabilitation program is committed to helping people with disabilities become part of America's workforce. Our employer-focused website, **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 6,071 Floridians with significant disabilities find or keep a job. For more information about VR and its services, call (800) 451-4327 or visit **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").