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Communications Office  
**News Release**

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**For Media Use:**  
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### **Tidbits Honored for Hiring People with Disabilities**

**JACKSONVILLE, FL** – Lisa Warthen was happy to be alive as she walked away from the accident that left her with organic brain syndrome. “I was the one that was hit by the 18-wheeler off of US-1,” she tells the audience at the Disability Employment Awareness Celebration in Jacksonville in May. “I’m supposed to be paralyzed and not remember anything,” says Lisa. “But I’m here. I’m working.”

Lisa and Mandrell Mitchell are two Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) customers working for Tidbits Restaurant and Catering, a local business recently honored for their commitment to hiring people with disabilities. “We’ve benefited from them as much as they’re benefitting from working here,” says Clara Leblac, the owner of Tidbits. “We see them as having abilities to help us in our business. We look to what they can do, not what they can’t.”

Clara has employed several workers with disabilities in her 29 years in the business. It started when she needed qualified help for her company and called the local ARC, and the relationship has since blossomed. “They have a great track record for staying a long time, like most people with disabilities do,” she says.

Clara encourages other businesses that are hesitant to hire people with disabilities, to give it a chance and find success as she has. “They’re missing opportunities for their own business staffing,” she says. “We all have some type of disability. Let them shine with their abilities. You can learn so much from different people.”

One of those employees, Mandrell, was a VR customer in Alabama before he came to Florida. Mandrell has a learning disability and Scoliosis, and credits VR for helping him find his footing in Florida. “VR took me from nothing and gave me something,” he says. Mandrell works for Tidbits washing dishes and helping out where he is needed. It’s a job he loves.

Lisa also loves working at Tidbits. Her coworkers and managers make her feel happy and loved. Tearing up, she says ‘Ms. Clara’ is like a mother to her, helping her stay on the right track. “Thank you so much from the bottom of my heart, I love you,” says Lisa.

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Lisa also thanked VR for helping her find a place where she loves to work. “This is a wonderful program!” When asked about her future goals, Lisa says she is very content. “As long as I keep believing and have faith and have a great job, my goal is complete.”

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 111 offices across Florida, and last year helped 5,018 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”).