A Note from the Executive Director

John Lui  Ph.D., MBA, CRC, Executive Director

I am proud to announce that SVRI recently became the first rehabilitation facility in the country to be accredited by CARF for Benefits Planning. This is an emerging profession, and we at SVRI are proud to be at the forefront of its development.

There are several ways to learn more about this field, and several ways to become involved. The National Association of Disability Specialists (NADBS), a division of the National Rehabilitation Association (NRA) has recently been developed as a “home” for benefits specialists. The goal of NADBS is to increase public understanding of the social and economic gain to society of empowering persons with disabilities to become self-sufficient, self-supporting, and contributing members of the community. It also provides a professional code of conduct and a credentialing process that will promote the profession, but, most importantly, will protect the consumer. Another resource is the newly formed Work Incentives Benefits Specialists Association (WIBSA), which will have its initial conference on July 15, 2010. For more information about this new association contact Jolene Wanek at wanek@eri-wi.org.

I encourage you to learn about and become involved in these organizations.

Because of my interest in this area, I’ve recently published two articles: “An Emerging Profession—Disability Benefits Specialists” in the Winter 2009 issue of the Rehabilitation Counselors & Educators Journal, and “Disability Benefits Specialists – A Role De-

lineation Study,” which is currently in press and will be published in the Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation. For the role delineation study I developed the Benefits Specialists Practice Inventory and conducted a nationwide study to look at the essential functions of benefits specialists. This study will be used as a foundation tool for the Benefits Specialists credentialing process.

I welcome any involvement and feedback in this area, as well as in any area of rehabilitation and evaluation. You may contact me at luij@uwstout.edu.

We hope to see you at our Fall Conference, “Turning a New Leaf,” on October 20-21. Have a great summer!

Al Noll Retires as Transition Partnership Manager

Al Noll will be retiring this summer as Transition Partnership School Manager after a 33-year career with SVRI. In 2007 he retired from his full-time role as SVRI’s Director of Development. During his career with SVRI he has also served as Director of the Assistive Technology and Assessment Center, Director of the Center for Rehabilitation Technology, Vocational Specialist, and Vocational Evaluator.

Since 2007 Al has continued his work with the Transition Partnership School, which he helped develop from its inception in 2004. Through his hard work, commitment, and team-building skills he has helped 61 high school students with disabilities from 19 Wisconsin School Districts become more independent and develop both vocationally and personally. He has also been a key contributor in helping Northwest Airlines better understand the role and function of airline staff.

Through the years Al has made countless contributions to the field of vocational rehabilitation and evaluation, and will be greatly missed. After retirement he plans on spending more time with his family, wrestling his 7 grandkids, traveling, hunting, fishing, and all-around having a good time.

Join us in wishing Al a happy, well-deserved retirement!
Resurgence in Employment-Based Assessments

In the past year SVRI has seen a resurgence in referrals for employment-based assessments from Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors in Workforce Development Areas 6 and 7. This service combines job seeking skills training with an assessment of an individual’s job-readiness as it relates to soft skills identified as necessary by employers, as well as employer’s performance expectations. A final report outlines recommendations for job search planning. Many counselors see this service as an effective way to help their consumers recognize deficits that could impact employability. Development of the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) incorporates the recommendations for developing the soft skills required in a job search and for achieving a successful employment outcome.

During the employment-based assessment, SVRI’s employment services staff meets with the consumer to examine areas of interest related to possible employment, the appropriateness of current job-seeking tools (e.g., resume and cover letter), the ability to complete job applications, knowledge of the local/area labor market, their transferable skills, and the benefits of working with a placement specialist. Evaluation and service tools used include the COPS Interest Inventory and SVRI’s Job Seeking Skills curriculum.

For more information about this service, please contact Rhonda Lewan, Employment Specialist, at lewanr@uwstout.edu.

Rehabilitation Science Connections Formed in China

In March of 2010, John Lui visited Sichuan University in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China. While there he spent 1.5 weeks with occupational and physical therapy rehabilitation science faculty and students training in the concepts of case management, independent living, assistive technology, community resources, and the model of disability. John stated that it was a great experience and formed a strong connection with the rehabilitation science fields and professions in Hong Kong and in China, and will hopefully yield student and professional exchange opportunities.

CARF Accreditation for SVRI Benefits Planning Services

SVRI recently became the first rehabilitation facility in the nation to receive accreditation in Benefits Planning from the internationally-recognized Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF).

SVRI began providing comprehensive benefits planning in 2004 to accomplish its mission of creating innovative and responsive services for Wisconsin citizens. Individualized long-term benefits analysis and planning is vital for people living with significant disabilities. The fear of losing benefits can often be a road block to consumers’ goals of pursuing employment and becoming self-sufficient, but effective benefits planning services can help consumers create a secure foundation for long-term employment and health outcomes.

CARF’s accreditation recognizes SVRI’s focus on helping consumers achieve economic self-sufficiency as they progress in education and employment, and on minimizing the time between referral for the service and completing the individualized benefits plan for the consumer. Other service elements recognized by CARF include SVRI’s focus on easy access by consumers, including effective communication and learning style accommodations and convenient service locations.

For further information on SVRI’s comprehensive benefits planning services please, contact Cheryl Fine at (715) 232-1794 or finec@uwstout.edu.
Creating Possibilities for Students with Disabilities

At a national college level students with disabilities represent 11% of enrolled students. Unfortunately, graduation gaps between these students and their non-disabled peers are abysmally disproportionate. According to research, 47% of students with disabilities fail to graduate with a degree as compared to 36% of their counterparts without disabilities. This correlates to an even larger gap of students with disabilities who fail to obtain employment upon graduation.

Michael Lawler, Senior Rehabilitation Specialist with SVRI, has developed two research projects to identify the challenges that stand in the way of students with disabilities from achieving their educational and employment goals, and more specifically, the specialized needs of students with disabilities in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) programs. The projects will also identify the needs of faculty, staff, the learning environment itself, and employers to allow for the potential development of an accommodation service model that would maximize students’ ability to learn and achieve employment upon graduation. These research projects were recently approved for funding through UW-Stout’s College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences.

The research design will combine surveys, focus groups, and interviews with pre-college and college-level students, parents, faculty, instructional and support staff of UW-Stout; and employers of UW-Stout graduates. The project will collect data to address needs of students with disabilities in the areas of college preparation, recruitment, retention, and placement. It is hypothesized that providing a comprehensive array of services (in the form of pre-college preparation, universally designed learning in the classroom, full accommodation of the student through universally designed learning supports, and intensive job seeking skill development), will significantly impact the low placement rates of college graduates with disabilities.

Michael Lawler will be assisted in this research by Dr. Jill Klefstad, Ed.D.; Dr. Kathleen Deery, PhD., CRC; Kimberly Nimsgern, M.S.; Dr. Laura McCullough, PhD; and Kara James, MS, CRC, CVE. For more information about this research, please contact Michael Lawler at lawlerm@uwstout.edu.

AT Focus:
The Herman Miller Embody Chair

SVRI’s Assistive Technology Lab recently purchased a Herman Miller Embody chair. The seat and back of the chair adjusts as a person moves to provide constant support while reducing seated pressure. It is designed to increase the user’s blood circulation, improve oxygen flow, and decrease the user’s heart rate. SVRI assists clients with selecting, fitting, and modifying seating products that can increase their comfort and functioning. For more information, or if you’d like to see and try the Embody chair, contact Paul Schwartz at schwartzpa@uwstout.edu.

Save the Date for Wisconsin’s Largest Assistive Technology Conference

December 2 & 3, 2010
Holiday Inn & Convention Center, Stevens Point, WI

Register Online!
Go to www.atacrosslifespan.org for more information.

Finding Answers, Providing Solutions, Ensuring Futures
- SVRI Motto -
Online Professional Development

Need continuing education credits? Want to expand your knowledge in a particular area? With SVRI’s online courses you can learn in the comfort of your office or home, whenever it is convenient for you! Upcoming courses include:

- Rehabilitation Ethics – July 8 to August 12
- Psychiatric Disabilities – August 10 to September 30
- Physical Disabilities – September 2 to October 15
- CRC Exam Prep Workshop: September 2 to last test date

Contact April Pierson with any questions: piersona@uwstout.edu.
See our website for more information: www.uwstout.edu/svri