

**AgrAbility Virginia**

## AGRABILITY PROJECT



## AGRABILITY MEDIA DAY PROVES TO BE A BIG SUCCESS

On October 20, 2003 a crowd of AgrAbility Virginia clients, Rural Rehabilitation Partnership members, legislators and the press gathered on a beautiful apple orchard in Bedford, Virginia to witness Congressman Robert Goodlatte, chairman of the U.S. Agriculture Committee, launch the statewide AgrAbility Virginia program. The success of this Media Day event was due to the sharing of client stories, the collaboration of the Rural Rehabilitation Partnership, and the excitement created by the future plans of AgrAbility Virginia.

### **AgrAbility Virginia Clients**

Storytelling and peer support was a main activity found at Media Day. Disabled farmers, family members and friends gathered to celebrate the joy of farming. Creative ideas and networking opportunities were abundant. Orchard and cattle farmer, Barry Arrington shared the success he has achieved despite his disabling condition. In 1994, he sustained injuries that left him with quadriplegia. He began working closely with Rehab Engineer Dave Law of Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center and David Roswell of the Department of Rehabilitative Services to adapt a tractor to enable Arrington to become a productive member of the farming community again. Arrington demonstrated his modified tractor for the crowd. He was joined by fellow AgrAbility Virginia clients Alvin Blaha, a soybean and peanut farmer, Ned Jeter, a beef cattle farmer, and Raymond Bradshaw, a meat goat farmer. Just to name a few. A formal peer support network is on the horizon for AgrAbility Virginia.



**Special "Thank you" to Barry Arrington for hosting the media event at his apple orchard.**



Members of the Rural Rehabilitation Partnership

### **Rural Rehabilitation Partnership**

The benefits reaped by a collaboration of numerous statewide organizations were also clearly evident at the Media Day. To help achieve AgrAbility Virginia's goal of promoting success in agriculture for farmers with disabilities and their families, the Rural Rehabilitation Partnership was created. The members of this partnership include AgrAbility Virginia, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Easter Seals Virginia, the Department of Rehabilitative Services, Virginia Assistive Technology System, Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center, Virginia Farm Bureau Safety Program, and Centers for Independent Living. Key partners of this Rural Rehabilitation Partnership were on hand to support the expansion of the program throughout Virginia.

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## Partner Highlight: Virginia Assistive Technology System

The Virginia Assistive Technology System (VATS) is a statewide systems change project established in 1990 which is committed to improving the quality of life for all Virginians by increasing awareness and accessibility of assistive technology. Through a variety of consumer driven activities and programs, information and technical assistance are provided on devices, services and funding resources. In partnership with consumers, employers, educators, public and private agencies; VATS strives to bring about change in practice, policies, and laws to improve access to assistive technology for all citizens of the Commonwealth.

VATS has three Assistive Technology Regional Sites that pro-



vide local contact points for information and resources. These Regional Sites, which are located at George Mason University, Old Dominion University, and Virginia Tech, provide assistive technology training, public awareness, and general technical assistance. VATS also offers a statewide information and referral service for questions related to assistive and information technology. By toll free telephone (800-435-8490) or Internet based contact [www.vats.org](http://www.vats.org), VATS provides current information and appropriate referral for all inquiries.

VATS works continually to discover ways to finance the assistive technology that will increase a person's independence, productivity, and quality of life. The 6<sup>th</sup> Edition of [A Resource Guide to Assistive Technology Funding](#) has current information and is available upon request. Legislative efforts have also made possible the Assistive Technology Loan Fund Authority (ATLFA), which is a statewide loan-financing program for residents of Virginia. The ATLFA has a multifaceted approach that includes a

For more information about VATS call the VATS State office at 800-435-8490 or the Southwest Regional Office at Virginia Tech at 540-231-4270.

low-interest buy-down program, a loan guarantee program, as well as a revolving loan fund for equipment and technology. In partnership with Sun Trust Bank, the ATLFA is able to make loans available to qualifying borrowers who have a disability, a family member of someone who has a self-identified limitation to a major life function, or a small business. Additional loan information and applications can be found at [www.atlfa.org](http://www.atlfa.org) or by contacting an office of the Virginia Assistive Technology System.

Finally, VATS is part of an Inter-agency Workgroup on Aging which develops initiatives to improve access to assistive technology devices and services for older citizens of the Commonwealth, their families, caregivers and other professionals. (Article submitted by VATS)

*Continued "Media Day Success"*

### **Future of AgrAbility Virginia**

The National AgrAbility Project was created in 1990 and a Virginia pilot program serving the southwest region of the Commonwealth was established in 2002. The expansion of AgrAbility Virginia to serve the entire state is one of the many exciting developments. With statewide coverage, the increased need for outreach and fund raising has become evident. The AgrAbility Virginia webpage (<http://agrability.ext.vt.edu>) is supporting this growth by providing vital information to a larger audience. The number of public presentations and educational seminars is also slated to increase in the coming year. To help continue to develop the AgrAbility Virginia program, additional Service Coordinators have been recently hired. (See page 3 for details.) These exciting changes will aid the on going success of the AgrAbility Virginia program.

## NEW FACES AT AGRABILITY

AgrAbility Virginia is pleased to welcome Jenny Gardner, Thurston Bower, and Ron Saacke to the AgrAbility team. As Service Coordinators, Jenny, Thurston, and Ron will provide direct services to farmers and farm family members with disabilities. AgrAbility Virginia is very fortunate to have a team of individuals that offer so many strengths and experiences. The diversity and variety among our staff will be beneficial as we seek to serve Virginia farmers with disabilities.

### Jenny Gardner

Raised on a 350 acre grain farm, Jenny's family grew wheat, corn, soybeans, oats, and hay. After graduating from Penn State in 1996 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Applied Behavioral Science, Jenny worked for an organization serving adults with Mental Retardation. She and her husband recently moved to Virginia with their three children Emily, Mollie, and Livie. Jenny is excited to be able to combine her love for agriculture with her professional goals of serving people. She recently stated, "I am proud to be part of a team of professionals committed to improving the lives of farmers with disabilities."



### Thurston Bower



"Helping others improve their standard of living" is one of the ideals of Service Coordinator, Thurston Bower. Thurston's dedication to her community began at a young age through volunteer work with the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army Day Care Center. She has had the pleasure of representing the Make-A-Wish Foundation in San Francisco, CA as their Special Events Coordinator. Her recent professional focus has been in the areas of Human Resources, Safety and Marketing here in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Thurston has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology and in Environmental Science from the University of Virginia and resides with her husband and newborn son on Smith Mountain Lake.

### Ron Saacke

As Safety Coordinator for Virginia Farm Bureau, Ron brings a great deal of knowledge and networking to the AgrAbility program. He will continue his full time employment with Virginia Farm Bureau, and will work part time for the AgrAbility program, primarily in the Richmond area. A graduate of the Agricultural Economics and Agricultural Management program at Virginia Tech, Ron has worked in the Agricultural industry for more than 16 years. He resides in Rockville, Virginia with his wife and two children.



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“Promoting success in agriculture for people with disabilities and their families.”



## **All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) Use is Worth Monitoring**

ATV's are often used for recreation however, on the farm there are a growing number of jobs that include the use of these specialized vehicles. The Farm Safety 4 Just Kids organization reports that many of these jobs are given to children who may operate the ATV in an unsafe manner without proper training or supervision.

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, 3,716 ATV related deaths have occurred since 1982. Thirty five percent of those killed were less than age 16 and fifteen percent were less than age 12. The number of injuries rises annually, but in 1999 nearly 85,000 hospitalization injuries were reported, 40% were children under 16 years old. In almost half of the injuries reported, children were riding ATV's that were too large for their size and skill level. And, although only 14% of operators are under the age of 16, they are 2.5 times more likely to be injured than operators aged 16-34.

To reduce the risk of injury or death, be sure to have every ATV operator read the owner's manual and consider the following suggested safety practices offered by

Farm Safety 4 Just Kids:

- Drivers should receive sufficient training and supervision.
- Restrict the use of ATV's by children.
- Always wear personal protective equipment (especially a helmet) when operating an ATV.
- Maintain correct body position and weight distribution during ATV operation.
- Refrain from taking unnecessary risks such as performing stunts, using alcohol or drugs, speeding and accepting riders.
- ATV's are not to be driven on paved roads.
- Do not operate an ATV under adverse conditions such as inclement weather, insufficient light, on hazardous terrain or an ATV in need of repair.

Consider starting your child on an ATV the same way you would a car. Take it slowly, the potential for disaster is real!

(Article submitted by Virginia Farm Bureau Safety. For more information log on to [www.vafb.com](http://www.vafb.com).)