NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH

“INCLUSION DRIVES INNOVATION”
October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. It is an opportunity to reaffirm the Department of Defense’s (DoD) commitment to recruit, retain, and advance individuals with disabilities throughout our workforce and to recognize the important contributions American workers with disabilities make each and every day.

This presentation provides a brief historical timeline leading to the establishment of National Disability Employment Awareness Month. It highlights two programs that are leading our nation closer to equality for individuals with disabilities and opportunities for employment: the Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program and the Workforce Recruitment Program. Finally, it honors—Judith Gilliom.
The Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) have chosen the theme, “Inclusion Drives Innovation.”

In their press release U.S. Secretary of Labor Alexander Acosta said, “Americans of all abilities must have access to good, safe jobs. Smart employers know that including different perspectives in problem-solving situations leads to better solutions. Hiring employees with diverse abilities strengthens their business, increases competition, and drives innovation.”

https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/odep/odep20170802
National Disability Employment Awareness Month began on August 11, 1945, with the signing of Presidential Proclamation 2664 stating, “Whereas the people of this National [sic] are determined to foster an environment in which those of their fellow citizens who have become physically handicapped can continue to make their rightful contribution to the work of the world and can continue to enjoy the opportunities and rewards of that work.”

The first week in October is declared as “National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week.”

http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=87042
In 1947, the White House designated a committee to promote “National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week.”

State and local groups across the nation, launch a publicity campaign to persuade the public that good business practice includes hiring disabled Americans.
In 1962, the word “physically” was removed to acknowledge the employment needs and contributions of individuals with all types of disabilities.

In 1988, Congress expanded the observance to a month and renamed it “National Disability Employment Awareness Month.”
In 1990, the DoD established the Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program (CAP) to provide assistive technology and reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities.

The program’s mission is to ensure that people with disabilities and wounded Service members have equal access to opportunities in the DoD and throughout the Federal government.

CAP serves as a resource to the DoD and partner agencies.

Assistive technology promotes greater independence for individuals with disabilities by providing them products, devices, and equipment so they can perform tasks that they were formerly unable to accomplish, or had difficulty accomplishing.

This technology helps individuals with disabilities communicate better with team members, and helps teammates better communicate with those with disabilities. Therefore, assistive technology is for the benefit of all parties - not just individuals with disabilities - and leads to better group communication and collaboration.

Reasonable accommodation is defined as any modification or adjustment to a job or the work environment that will enable a qualified applicant or employee with a disability to participate in the application process or to perform essential job functions.

Reasonable accommodation also includes modifications to guarantee that a qualified individual with a disability has the same rights and privileges in employment equal to those of employees without disabilities.

In 1995, the U.S. Departments of Labor and Defense established the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) for College Students with Disabilities.

WRP is a Federal-wide recruitment and referral program. The program is designed to provide opportunities to emerging professionals with disabilities for both temporary and permanent positions nationally and internationally.

https://wrp.gov/LoginPre.do;jsessionid=A97D162EB5835A126E52D3B252776FF6?method=login
The program provides access to one of the largest pools of Schedule A eligible candidates and is recognized as a model for recruitment and hiring by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

What is Schedule A?
Schedule A simplifies the hiring process for persons with disabilities and, in some cases, hiring officials may select solely from a list of qualified Schedule A applicants.

https://wrp.gov/LoginPre.do;jsessionid=A97D162EB5835A126E52D3B252776FF6?method=login
In 2017, the WRP database contained profiles of more than 1,800 job candidates from nearly every state and represented more than 115 colleges and universities nationwide, representing all academic backgrounds.

For 25 years, Judith C. Gilliom, promoted work force diversity and was a champion for employees with disabilities. She holds the distinction of being the Pentagon’s first department-level disability program manager.

Earlier in her career, she worked for the U.S. Civil Servant Commission and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Her accomplishments there included writing two of the founding documents that became the basis of the federal affirmative action program for individuals with disabilities.
Gilliom understood the challenges individuals with disabilities faced. At the age of 27, she was permanently paralyzed from the neck down as the result of an accident.

During her tenure, she created the Department’s disabled work force recruitment program, and assisted in the start-up of the Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program for disabled employees.

“Inclusion and empowerment are the things that make diversity great,” she said at the DoD’s annual disability awards ceremony in 2002. “People with disabilities are now part of the mainstream. We belong.”

After her death in 2008, Clarence A. Johnson, principal director of the Office of Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity, commended Gilliom as a leader in the federal disability community. “She was a key component in this office as our DoD disability program manager,” Johnson said.

Her inspiring story and photograph are displayed in the Pentagon’s A-ring with other distinguished DoD civilian employees.

The DoD recognizes its vital role in advancing disability awareness in the workplace and as the Nation’s largest employer, DoD employs thousands of workers with disabilities.

DoD has been a leader in recognizing the strengths and values individuals with disabilities bring into the workforce. The DoD remains diligent in providing every person opportunities for a meaningful career in a culture that embraces diversity and inclusivity.
All photographs are public domain and are from various sources as cited.

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