

THE MAYOR’S ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES 24TH ANNUAL RECOGNITION RECEPTION

By Melissa Fortson

The Mayor’s Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities presented awards at its 24th Annual Recognition Reception, held November 29, 2005, at the Adventure Science Center in Nashville.

Awards were given in several categories and recognized individuals, agencies, businesses, and organizations that have made significant contributions to the disability community.

Also recognized were artists whose work was featured in Creative Expressions XI. This annual exhibit, which features work in a variety of mediums by artists with a wide range of ages and abilities, is jointly sponsored by the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center and the Mayor’s Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities. The exhibit provides artists with disabilities an audience for their creativity and an opportunity for inclusion in the art community.



MAYOR BILL PURCELL (PHOTO CREDIT: METRO GOV’T OF NASHVILLE, GARY LAYDA)

Speaking on behalf of the Mayor’s Advisory Committee, Chair Brenda Dillon praised the winners, saying, “You are what makes Nashville such a wonderful place to call home.” *Breaking Ground* extends its congratulations to the recognized artists and award recipients, three of whom are profiled below.

BERNIE SHEAHAN

As a recipient of the Media/Communications Award, freelance journalist Bernie Sheahan was recognized for communicating positively the activities and issues related to disability and using “People First” language to create and promote positive images of people with disabilities. In May 2005, the *Nashville Scene* published “A Beautiful Mind’s Uncertain Future,” Ms. Sheahan’s account of her experience of bipolar disorder and the impact of the loss of TennCare coverage on people with severe and persistent mental illness (SPMI).



BERNIE SHEAHAN (PHOTO CREDIT: NASHVILLE SCENE)

“I always knew I’d ‘tell my story; I had to,” says Ms. Sheahan. “Not just for the catharsis, but for the help I knew it could give others who struggle in silence. Mental illness is still a silent killer. We used to

whisper about cancer, and it’s hard to imagine that now; we have ribbons and wristbands and all manner of fundraisers. We walk, run, bike and eat to raise awareness and make money to fight cancer. Every celebrity you know will join the cause to fight that disease, and rightly so—cancer seems to touch everyone. But so does mental illness. We just don’t talk about it. And it’s incurable.

“God bless Liz Garrigan (*Nashville Scene* editor) for giving me that much space and that much freedom. The result was overwhelming; dozens of e-mails and phone calls thanking me and the *Scene* for bringing mental illness into the light. People still tell me how much it meant to them, for themselves or a sister or husband—to understand bipolar disorder or to know someone else shares their struggles. I’m so grateful. I know people who’ve found hope in my story, and that’s the best part of it for me.”

MATTHEW DAVID DRUMRIGHT

Matthew Drumright exhibited five pieces in Creative Expressions XI. A 22-year-old Brentwood native, Mr. Drumright started taking photographs when he was ten and holds two jobs in order to support himself and his photography. A 2005 recipient of VSA Arts of Tennessee’s Professional Artist Award, Mr. Drumright has also displayed his work in the S. Dillon Ripley Center at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C..



MATTHEW DRUMRIGHT (PHOTO CREDIT: METRO GOV’T OF NASHVILLE, GARY LAYDA)

Breaking Ground recently spoke with Mr. Drumright about his artwork.

BG: How do you feel when you see your photographs in an exhibit?

MD: I feel good and proud. I hope my pictures make people smile.

BG: I heard that you decided to follow your dream of becoming a photographer when you were in high school. What do you like about digital photography?

MD: I like to see how the pictures look right away. I don’t have to pay so much for film and can take the picture over right away if I don’t like how the picture looks.

BG: How do you choose your subjects?

MD: I just take picture of things I like. My family, friends, nature and sports. Sometimes someone will ask me to take a picture of

something special.

BG: Do you have any advice for artists with disabilities?

MD: Don’t let people say you can’t be an artist. Follow your dreams. Roselyn Carter said, “Have confidence in your abilities and have the strength to follow through.” That is me. My parents and family help me and believe in me.

DREW BENNETT

A starter for the Tennessee Titans, wide receiver Drew Bennett was applauded for his efforts off the field. Mr. Bennett devotes his charitable efforts to programs that serve individuals with disabilities and started his own foundation called “The Drew Crew” to encourage others to support these organizations. Mr. Bennett also serves on the board of United Cerebral Palsy of Middle Tennessee. For these efforts, Mr. Bennett was recognized as someone who uses his talents and creativity to promote awareness of disability issues.

“I have seen my brother deal with cerebral palsy and he has been a great source of strength for me. As someone in the spotlight, I have a chance to lend a public voice to those who deal with cerebral palsy and I want to take full advantage of that platform. It obviously means a great deal to me to help in whatever way I can. This award is nice in that it brings more attention to the cause and lets people know that they too can make a difference in the causes that matter to them.”



BRENDA DILLON & DREW BENNETT (PHOTO CREDIT: METRO GOV’T OF NASHVILLE, GARY LAYDA)

2005 AWARD RECIPIENTS

Agency/Organization	Nashville Convention and Visitors’ Bureau
Artist/Performer/Athlete	Drew Bennett
Educator	Mary Ann Armbrister
Employer	Gaylord Opryland Hotel and Convention Center
Entertainment	Regal Cinema Hollywood 27 Tennessee Performing Arts Center
Family	Skye Solomon
Health Care Provider	Adriana Bialostovsky, MD
Legislative Advocate	Gordon Bonnyman
Media/Communications	Joe Dubin – WKRN Bernie Sheahan
Mack West Children’s Award	Grace Walker Goad
Professional Award	Sam Adams Martha Lafferty
Trey Pointer Young Citizen Award	Lericko Scruggs
Volunteers	Jackie Beasley Richard Buck Dennis Campbell Pat Galvin Daniel (“Dary”) Gonzales Gwendolyn A. Pace Joyce Weingartner
Jo Andrews Award	Andrea Cooper

Since its inception in 1976, the Mayor’s Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities has promoted public education and awareness, advocated for persons with disabilities and their family members, and coordinated local activities to bring about positive outcomes in the disability arena. For more information about the Committee and its activities, contact the Metro Nashville ADA Compliance Division at 615-862-8774 or ADA@nashville.gov .

NIGHT SNOWFALL (DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY, MATTHEW DRUMRIGHT)



VANDERBILT KENNEDY CENTER 2005 RECOGNIZED ARTISTS

Anne Ambrose
Laura Brookhart
Matthew David Drumright
Grace Walker Goad
Daniel Hepburn
Geraldine Kuttub
Katherine Prats
Bernadette Resha
Delsenia Sales
Thaddeus N. Tekell

Since 1994, the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center has sponsored exhibits of art by and about people with disabilities in order to demonstrate the diverse talents of individuals with disabilities. For more information on Creative Expressions, or to suggest a future exhibit, contact Elise McMillan at 615-343-2540 or elise.mcmillan@vanderbilt.edu .