



Virginia Board for People with Disabilities Announces Recipient of 2005 Outstanding Achievement Award

The Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, the Commonwealth's Developmental Disabilities Planning Council, is pleased to announce that Max and Garth Larcen of Max's Positive Vibe Café in Richmond, are the recipients of its 2005 Outstanding Achievement Award. Presentation of the award occurred during a reception on Sunday, January 29, 2006, celebrating the first anniversary of the Café and recognizing the community supporters who helped make it a success.

In inaugurating this new award, the Virginia Board seeks to recognize recipients whose achievements have resulted in a better quality of life for Virginians with disabilities and creatively overcome barriers to improve the system of services and supports available to them. The winners' accomplishments must have involved extraordinary effort above and beyond what is normally expected or required, had lasting positive impact, and permanently changed individuals' lives for the better. The Larcens and the Positive Vibe Café were chosen by the Board from an extremely competitive pool of nominees representing all regions of Virginia and the full spectrum of public and private services for people with disabilities.

Since its opening on January 15, 2005, Max's Positive Vibe Café has established a reputation both as a successful training and employment model for people with disabilities and as an outstanding neighborhood restaurant with an eclectic and delicious menu, friendly staff and a welcoming attitude toward guests both with and without disabilities. Father and son, Garth and Max Larcen, conceived the Positive Vibe in 2002 in response to Max's frustration in finding employment due to the growing impact of muscular dystrophy on his life. Together, Max and Garth decided to create a new kind of business and educational model that would provide not only employment for Max but also an opportunity for others with physical, sensory and cognitive disabilities to expand their work skills and obtain jobs. With support from family, friends and the local business, civic and educational communities, Garth and Max founded the non-profit organization **Get Lost MD**, and through hard

work, creative fundraising events, donations and in-kind contributions of equipment and supplies brought their concept to life.

Located in the Stratford Hills Shopping Center in Southside Richmond, Max's Positive Vibe Café is designed to be accessible to people with disabilities from its automatic front door to its kitchen. Training for people with disabilities referred by local schools' transition offices and other organizations includes food preparation, customer service and restaurant management. The Café uses a combination of paid and volunteer staff with and without disabilities to provide the training and to run the restaurant and a growing catering business. Graduates of the training have gone on to work at the Positive Vibe and in other food service operations around the city. Without

attracting any special notice, the dining room décor features wider aisles, a lowered bar and accessible tables for guests. Adjustable work surfaces and other assistive technology accommodate the needs of workers. Weekly entertainment includes musicians with disabilities. The menu emphasizes fresh ingredients and a diverse, healthy diet. The public's response has been good, and the Café is on track to become self-sustaining in just a few years.

The Positive Vibe Café has already received an abundance of recognition from local, state, and national organizations and news media. Over the coming months, the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities will work with the Larcens to spread awareness and encourage replication of their innovative training and employment model and, in general, to work toward greater opportunities for self-determination, independence, productivity and inclusion in all facets of community life for Virginians with disabilities.

Additional information about the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities and the Outstanding Achievement Award can be found at www.vaboard.org or can be requested by calling 800-846-4464 V/TTY. To learn more about Max's Positive Vibe Café go to www.positivevibecafe.com or contact the restaurant at 804-560-9622 (voice), 804-560-9623 (fax) or getlostmd@aol.com ■

