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*To Be Unique, To Be an Impact*, Remarks at SSA

Diversity Days Program

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I shall endeavor to assure my remarks are as short as possible. I am honored to provide remarks on the experience of people with disabilities at this Diversity Days program.

Diversity is part of the human experience. Disability is part of diversity. Disability is therefore part of the human experience.

Your presence in this auditorium demonstrates that you are motivated employees. I hope that my brief remarks will inspire you, as motivated employees, towards continued progress towards a more inclusive culture for employees with disabilities at the SSA.

As way of background, I am an employee with a disability. Specifically, I am vision impaired. I enjoy partnership with a dog guide, whose name is Langer. You can find more about Langer at the newly designed website for children at the Md. Library for the Blind. I mention this background, as I believe knowing my frame of reference as a fellow minority sets the stage for my remarks.

To be a person with a disability means to be unique in the crowd. Dictionary.com defines unique as, "...Existing as the only one or as the sole example..." Synonyms for unique are, on the one hand, singular, and, on the other, unrivaled. I submit that the way in which we confront our disability – its benefactions and its challenges – defines if we are singular without impact or are unrivaled and are able to contribute to the world in any capacity and with any talents we may have been granted.

Yes. There are benefactions to a disability. As my wife says, we are moved to the front of the line sometimes at the airport, because of Langer. Unlike many individuals who enjoy the

love of companion animals or pets, I am able to have Langer in the cabin of aircraft when I travel.

And, yet, any of the employees with disabilities in the audience as well as me can attest that there are challenges, and outright negative consequences imposed by disabilities. Despite the enactment of the ADA, a successor to the Rehabilitation Act, there is still outright discrimination in the marketplace and in the workplace. From time to time, people with disabilities, including, myself, find themselves bogged in the mire and muck of - not recognizing the benefactions - and of acknowledging the negatives.

In having led dog guide handlers in the great state of Maryland, I have had the chance to come across many a person with a disability. I have noticed that there are too many of us who fall prey to victimization, (blaming the able-bodied), and interact with our fellow humans with a poor attitude.

Having this kind of perspective, I submit, is no way to shift from the singular to the unrivaled. My partnerships with other citizens as well as with our furry companions like Langer influence whatever level of achievement I may have obtained to date. I must attest, however, Langer always finds my speaking boring.

Those who would be great are those who confront their challenges to reach beyond who they are in a physical or financial sense to improve the world around them. There are myriad an able-bodied person, either in the marketplace or in the workplace, who need our help. I believe that each of us can contribute to the world around us, as disability is part of the human experience.

In conclusion, Ralph Waldo Emerson once stated that consistency is the hob goblin of a small mind.

Celebrate being inconsistent with the norm, that is, the sighted, the hearing, and the ambulatory for our disabilities cause us to be unique.

And, in uniqueness, is that we can be great!