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ILLINOIS TOLLWAY WINS STATE AWARD FOR LEADERSHIP IN HIRING AND ASSISTING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Tollway receives Agency of the Year Award for unprecedented third consecutive year

DOWNERS GROVE, IL – The Illinois Tollway was named 2015 Agency of the Year by the Interagency Committee on Employees with Disabilities (ICED) for the third consecutive year in recognition of its continuing efforts to expand opportunities for people with disabilities.

The ICED award, which was presented by Governor Bruce Rauner at a ceremony today at the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency in Springfield, recognizes Illinois government agencies for hiring and promoting people with disabilities, as well as developing innovative programs and providing accommodations to assist those employees.

“The state of Illinois appreciates the importance of a diverse workforce that promotes access, independence and opportunities for everyone, regardless of physical abilities,” said Governor Rauner. “All state employees should be empowered to do good work on behalf of the people of Illinois and have the opportunity to perform at the height of their abilities.”

The Tollway was commended for having a significant representation of people with disabilities in its workforce and for its proactive accommodation program for Tollway employees, applicants and customers with disabilities, as well as access improvements to its headquarters to benefit employees and members of the public with disabilities. In addition, the Tollway was recognized for offering job opportunities to people with disabilities at its Customer Service Call Center in partnership with The Chicago Lighthouse.

“It is unprecedented for a state agency to win the ICED award for two or more consecutive years,” said ICED Co-Chair and Department of Human Rights Director Rocco Claps. “The Illinois Tollway serves as a model for other employers, in Illinois and across the country, to follow when it comes to strong disability policies and programs.”

The ICED’s Agency of the Year award recognizes the Illinois Tollway as a leader among state agencies for representation of people with disabilities in its workforce, which, at nearly 13 percent, is significantly higher than the state average of 7 percent, and for its approach to implementing the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Illinois Human Rights Act by fully engaging in a flexible and interactive process to explore reasonable, effective and sometimes creative accommodations.

In addition, the Tollway is making significant improvements to the north entrance of its headquarters building in Downers Grove to accommodate employees and members of the public with disabilities. The enhancements will begin in the parking lot with wider, accessible spaces directly connected by a path to the entrance without the need to navigate the parking lot. Enhancements also include curb cuts along the path with textured gradients that serve as tactile warning surfaces, lighting and heat to prevent ice and snow buildup, a ramp and new power doors.

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“The Illinois Tollway constantly looks for ways to improve access for customers and employees alike,” said Illinois Tollway Executive Director Kristi Lafleur. “We are committed to providing all our customers with access to the full range of Tollway services and accommodating the needs of our employees with disabilities so that they can achieve their full potential on behalf of our customers.”

One of the Tollway’s accomplishments singled out by the ICED was the Tollway’s commitment to hiring people with disabilities and veterans at its technologically advanced Customer Service Call Center, which responds to Tollway customers who call I-800-UC-IPASS for account services and questions related to I-PASS. The Customer Service Call Center opened in October 2013 and is managed by The Chicago Lighthouse, a Chicago-based not-for-profit organization that helps provide employment to members of underserved communities.

“We are pleased to collaborate with The Chicago Lighthouse to provide employment opportunities for people in underserved communities, especially veterans and people with disabilities,” said Illinois Tollway Board Chair Paula Wolff. “This initiative has given the Tollway access to a broader range of talented, motivated workers we otherwise might not reach.”

The Customer Service Call Center located on the campus of the University of Illinois at Chicago includes specialized features for people with disabilities, including roomier work stations for wheelchairs and service animals, larger computer monitors, contrasting paint and fabrics to help distinguish objects and indirect lighting and writing surfaces designed to reduce glare, among other useful adjustments. Today, 29 percent of those employed at the Customer Service Call Center are qualified as persons with disabilities. There are currently 84 individuals with disabilities employed, up from 61 employees in 2013.

“We are delighted to congratulate the Illinois Tollway on this well-deserved award for their groundbreaking efforts in extending greater employment opportunities to people with disabilities and veterans,” said Dr. Janet Szlyk, president and chief executive officer of The Chicago Lighthouse. “We are so very proud to partner with them.”

The Tollway works closely with the ICED and several disability advocacy organizations in an effort to stay current on issues affecting people with disabilities, share best practices and for their help spreading the word about Tollway job opportunities. The ICED advocates for the rights of state employees with disabilities, recommends ways to strengthen and promote disability-related affirmative action programs in state agencies and presents workshops on disability-related issues for state agency professionals.

About the Illinois Tollway
The Illinois Tollway is a user-fee system that receives no state or federal funds for maintenance and operations. The agency maintains and operates 286 miles of interstate tollways in 12 counties in Northern Illinois, including the Reagan Memorial Tollway (I-88), the Veterans Memorial Tollway (I-355), the Jane Addams Memorial Tollway (I-90) and the Tri-State Tollway (I-94/I-294/I-80).