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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 second consecutive year

DOWNERS GROVE, IL – The Illinois Tollway was named 2014 Agency of the Year by the Interagency Committee on Employees with Disabilities (ICED) for its efforts to expand opportunities for people with disabilities. The Tollway was commended for employing a significant percentage of people with disabilities, offering extensive job accommodations to people with disabilities and opening its new Customer Service Call Center in partnership with The Chicago Lighthouse.

The award marks the second consecutive year that the Illinois Tollway has earned the honor, which recognizes Illinois government agencies for hiring and promoting people with disabilities, as well as developing innovative programs and providing accommodations to assist those employees.

“State government should provide everyone equal access to employment opportunities and the tools necessary to reach their full potential,” Governor Pat Quinn said. “Illinois values the contributions of every worker, regardless of physical abilities, in making our state agencies invaluable assets for the people of Illinois.”

The ICED award was presented at a ceremony today at the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency in Springfield.

“The Illinois Tollway has proved what the Interagency Committee on Employees with Disabilities has long professed, employing people with disabilities is the right thing to do for employers, as well as for the individuals involved,” said ICED Co-Chair and Department of Human Rights Director Rocco Claps. “The Tollway sets a standard that other Illinois employers, indeed other employers across the country, would be wise to work towards.”

The ICED’s Agency of the Year award recognizes the Illinois Tollway as a leader among state agencies for its approach to implementing the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Illinois Human Rights Act by fully engaging in a flexible and interactive process to explore reasonable, effective and sometimes creative accommodations.

“The Illinois Tollway continually works to improve access to employment opportunities for all qualified candidates as part of our commitment to diversity in our workforce,” said Executive Director Kristi Lafleur. “As an agency, we have ambitious goals and high expectations that demand we hire the best and brightest people available and we realize that we can accomplish those goals while accommodating the needs of people with disabilities.”

The Illinois Tollway is committed to ensuring that people with disabilities are aware of job opportunities, how to apply and how to request an accommodation to assist with the application process. In 2013, the Tollway employed 165 people with disabilities, more than 11 percent of its workforce of nearly 1,500 employees.

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Also, last year, the Tollway granted 80 accommodations for people with disabilities, including job restructuring to reassign non-essential work functions for employees with limited walking or lifting abilities, modified work schedules and accessible parking spaces. The Tollway also provided sign language interpreters for job applicants and customers contesting toll violations, as well as ADA training for all managers and supervisors.

One of the Tollway’s accomplishments cited by the ICED was the opening of a new, more technologically advanced Customer Service Call Center that is managed by The Chicago Lighthouse, a Chicago-based not-for-profit organization that helps provide employment to members of underserved communities. The Tollway awarded The Chicago Lighthouse a five-year, $61.5 million contract in 2012 to manage its call center, which responds to Tollway customers who call 1-800-UC-IPASS for account services and questions related to I-PASS.

“The Tollway is always eager to collaborate with community organizations such as The Chicago Lighthouse to provide employment opportunities for people who are underemployed or have special needs,” said Illinois Tollway Board Chair Paula Wolff. “These initiatives give the Tollway access to talented, motivated workers we otherwise might not reach.”

The new call center located on the campus of the University of Illinois at Chicago was built with specially designed facilities and workstations to accommodate people who are blind, visually impaired or physically disabled. Larger work stations can accommodate wheelchairs and service animals and some are equipped with larger computer monitors to assist the visually impaired. Currently, about 30 percent of the call center’s nearly 290 employees are disabled or military veterans.

“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 Jeanette Bonzani, vice president of human resources for 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).