

Abilities, not disabilities, are qualities of gifted Sandians

By Iris Aboytes

Every day Sandians face many challenges. How to counteract terrorism, how to help the health industry, how to produce more energy. From one equation to another, one idea to another, each challenge is being met.

In our midst are Sandians who have abilities that help in our strife to meet these challenges.

Meet Joe Durham (10511) and Mitzie Bower (12620).

Joe works in support of Sandia's Spend Plan application, Project Setup, and the Oracle Project accounting module. If his name sounds familiar, it is because he is the friendly voice that welcomes you to the budget hotline. "I enjoy our customers, I get so much personal satisfaction from helping them," he says. "I know them all by their voice."

Joe has been at Sandia 16 years, three of them as a contractor with Career Services. Joe attended the University of New Mexico and earned a degree in history, then decided to return to school and learn more about computing and data processing.

Joe, being selective, says one of the best memories of his teen years was his dad showing him how to drive a van. His father, a retired Navy captain, was not very calm as Joe was learning and his dad was both a passenger and default instructor.

Mitzie came to Sandia 19 years ago. She provides graphics to Engineering Sciences Center 9100. Multimedia presentations, web pages, T-shirts, etc., she does it all. Mitzie's degree is in fine arts from UNM. She credits her mom's strong encouragement for her college education. "You can't expect me to take care of you the rest of your life," her mother would say.

Mitzie is a self-confident Sandian who is married to her best friend, Tim. "Tim gives purpose to my life. When I met Tim, it was St. Valentine's

October is . . .

*Disability
Awareness Month*

Day and I took him cookies. In no uncertain words, he told me to leave him alone as he lay facing the floor from a Stryker-frame bed. I said, 'OK. Have a nice life.' He, of course, would not have said that if he could have seen how cute I was."

Both Joe and Mitzie raise the standards for Sandians. They both work out of wheelchairs. Both of their injuries were sports incurred, and both of their injuries occurred one week short of their senior year in high school.

Mitzie says she has been treated like a "princess" at Sandia. Joe says he has helped relax the way his colleagues interact with individuals who just happen to have disabilities. Mitzie and Joe credit their immediate families for their strength and well being.

The exuberant Mitzie is excited about her next home project, painting a life-size cast polyurethane horse with wildlife imagery. She says Tim, also in a wheelchair, is inventing a platform to anchor the horse at various tilted angles to allow Mitzie to paint areas she currently cannot reach. "Tim is worth his weight in gold," she says lovingly, "and a true blessing." He and their three dogs bring her life happiness. What would she change? Winning the lottery would be nice!

Joe loves his sports and music. A self-proclaimed sun worshipper, you can visit with Joe every day as he sits in his van at lunchtime soaking in the sun's rays. What would he change? He



JUST ANOTHER CHALLENGE — Mitzie Bower (12620) with the horse she is going to paint. At Sandia, Mitzie provides graphics to Engineering Sciences Center 9100.

would have perhaps thought more about what he wanted to do with his life while in college rather than just attending class to earn a degree.

In observance of October as Disability Employment Awareness Month, Tammie McNaughton, director of corporate workforce initiatives at Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield in Pittsburgh, Pa., says, "Guess what? They're just people like you and me."