

MEET OUR BOARD: DAVID GAUTHIER “A Door Opened, and I Was Chosen”

The past year and a half has been quite eventful for David Gauthier. In 2008 he met the First Lady of California, Maria Shriver, at her highly acclaimed Women’s



HRC Board Member David Gauthier joined his boss, Mayor Bob Foster, to open the Women’s Conference in Long Beach.

Conference at the Long Beach Convention Center. At the conference the First Lady showcased her program, WelInclude, to promote employment of people with developmental disabilities. At the same event, David was introduced by his Best Buddies Jobs Counselor Amber Coffman to Long Beach Mayor Bob Foster. Within

a week, he had a new job on the Mayor’s staff. The following year, the First Lady invited David and his boss, the Mayor, to open the conference together! David also soon found himself in Washington, D.C., with what he calls the “A Team” of Dr. Tim Shriver (Special Olympics), Anthony Kennedy Shriver (Best Buddies), Olympian Carl Lewis, and Joe Jonas of the Jonas Brothers – speaking to Nancy Pelosi and other members of Congress.

“I actually said out loud, “I’m sitting here next to Carl Lewis. What did I do to deserve this?”

And Carl Lewis answered, “You’re here because of who you are.”

Last summer, we are pleased to add, we welcomed David as a new member of the HRC Board of Trustees.

David has worked very hard to get where he is today. He grew up in Southern California, in Lake Arrowhead and the South Bay area. At the age of 4 he was diagnosed with cerebral palsy and attended special education classes from Kindergarten through 6th grade. At that point, he was able to join regular education classes, with adaptive physical education support.

While in high school, he participated in summer job programs working as a school custodian and then with the U.S. Forest Service, breaking trails in the San Bernardino National Forest. “It was the most fun I ever had working and getting paid.” After high school graduation he worked at jobs including cashier, truck driver and mover for a moving company, custodian and warehouse worker. He worked diligently to learn new skills and to move into better-paying jobs, so that he could reach his goal of living on his own, and he was always willing to push himself. “I’ve never had a problem getting or keeping a job,” but moving ahead was often a challenge. Sometimes his motor skills did keep him from pursuing certain jobs that he wanted.

“It can be difficult to get past employers’ pre-conceptions of what a person with a disability is capable of doing,” he says. And he also learned what he calls a valuable life lesson, “Just because you enjoy doing something, doesn’t mean you’re good at it.”

What David was very good at was working with people. This was evident when he worked as a cashier, attracted a steady stream of loyal customers and earned unusually high tips. It was something that HRC Employment Specialist Danielle Heck noticed, with Best Buddies Jobs Program Director Amber Coffman, when they recommended David as a candidate for the job in the Mayor’s office. It’s the reason he greets friends wherever he goes in downtown Long Beach, and why he’s become such a valuable member of the Mayor’s Office staff, helping with reception, ordering food, meeting preparations, and in any other way that is needed.

David sees his role with the HRC Board as “one of the volunteers, giving direction to the staff. I’m learning what it takes to run the whole thing, and the amount of commitment, work and dedication that everybody on the staff and board has to give.” Now, he says, life feels full of possibilities. “I never thought I’d be working where I’m working. I’m working for the Mayor of Long Beach. How cool is that?” ■