

Employer Award – 2006

Kroger Store # 477

2121 Lawrenceville – Suwanee Rd.
Suwanee, GA 30024

Manager: Patti Armstrong

Nominated by: Allison Vernon, Gwinnett Co. Schools

Presented by: Georgia's Statewide Transition Steering Committee

A grocery store manager's work may never be done, but that has not stopped Kroger Store #477's manager, Patti Armstrong, from reaching out to her community in Suwanee, Georgia, by opening Kroger's doors to students with special needs. As a partner with the local schools' Community Based Vocational Training, Ms. Armstrong has made her Kroger store a place where special education students get the opportunity to learn job skills while on the job.

In addition, Ms. Armstrong routinely hires students as part-time employees through the schools' Adapted Work Study Program. She not only hires them, she pays close attention to their behavior, work ethics and performance on the job. She takes the time to interact with students and discuss what is expected of them. She does not excuse behaviors but sees students' potential and pushes them to be successful. By both direct instruction and example she teaches other Kroger employees how to support students in developing valuable job skills and making appropriate work choices.

Ms. Armstrong was described in the nomination for this award as demonstrating "compassionate and nurturing leadership." She is not only challenging and leading students, she has recently joined Gwinnett County's new Interagency Transition Council and is – so far - the only employer member. Interagency Transition Councils are local or sometimes regionally based; their purpose is to collaborate for the successful transition from school to work of students with disabilities. Membership is voluntary and may include representatives from local high schools, colleges, state agencies such as labor/vocational rehabilitation, community mental health and developmental disabilities service providers, county services, the Chamber of Commerce and individual employers.

Ms. Armstrong's goal as a member of Gwinnett's Interagency Transition Council is to change the business community's attitude towards hiring people with disabilities. Kroger and Ms. Patti Armstrong have taken on the challenge of being change agents in both individual lives and in the life of their community. For this demonstrated initiative in establishing partnerships and employment opportunities that facilitate the employment and successful transition of students with disabilities – with our deep appreciation – we present this Employer Award to Kroger Store #477 and to its manager, Patti Armstrong.