

# The Story

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Intown West

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## Institute honors business for employing disabled

By Camille Goswick

A west side organization aimed at connecting disabled Atlantans with jobs presented its first employer of the year award at a breakfast ceremony last week.

Bobby Dodd Institute, which helps more than 800 disabled and disadvantaged people find jobs each year, honored Spectrum Industries for its commitment to the BDI mission. Spectrum has hired 14 people with disabilities or disadvantages over the past few years, making up about 40 percent of its non-management workforce.

The breakfast also recognized long-time BDI board member Bob

Freeman with the Circle of Excellence Award.

BDI board of directors chairman David McKenney said that Freeman's "vision, passion and leadership" made him the ideal candidate for the award, and recounted the numerous organizations Freeman has had a hand in creating or strengthening, including Café 458 on Edgewood Avenue, which serves lunch to homeless people during the week.

In accepting the award, Freeman said that having come from a family business that eventually merged with a Fortune 500 company, he had been able to apply his business skills to the

nonprofit world, creating organizations that not only served a particular population, but were viable business models as well. Freeman said that he continued to work with nonprofits because he constantly enjoyed so many "new life experiences."

BDI sponsors also heard from keynote speaker Jim Blanchard, CEO of Synovus Financial, who is recognized throughout Georgia for his leadership and dedication to strength-based development.

Blanchard called BDI's work "great and noble" and urged attendees to follow a "path of love" instead of one governed by rules and regulations. He said that though

the statistics involving unemployed disabled people are "staggering," he was "energized and motivated" to be part of the solution.

Blanchard told breakfast attendees that there was still "much work to be done," and encouraged each to "have the heart of a giver." Blanchard also advised attendees to make the most of their journeys through life.

BDI was founded 45 years ago in honor of Georgia Tech coach Bobby Dodd, who was a tireless advocate for the disabled. The nonprofit organization helps people find work by offering job training and placement, and also operates several affirmative businesses.

McKenney put BDI's mission into perspective by noting that jobs are not simply something people do during the day, but noted that employment is an integral part of a person's life and identity. He said that for the disabled, having a job means even more, and he said that those people often found employment only because "someone else makes it happen."

McKenney urged attendees to "do something today, not tomorrow" to help.

For more information about Bobby Dodd Institute, visit [www.bobbydodd.org](http://www.bobbydodd.org).