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## New Web site aims to connect disabled with potential jobs

By MIKE ELSWICK

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Connecting people who have disabilities to companies and organizations needing employees is the vision behind a new venture kicked off by Matt Lawrence and his employer, Longview's NetworkIP.

Lawrence, project manager for JobEnable.com, a Web site devoted to that goal, joined the telecommunications firm late last year and has been working to put his ideas into action for about a year. A victim of dystonia, a progressive neurological disorder, he knows firsthand the challenges and obstacles those with disabilities have in finding a job.



When he graduated from college with a bachelor's degree in journalism Lawrence conducted a statewide job search. "I couldn't find a job," he said. Lawrence had worked on the school newspaper and yearbook staffs while working on his bachelor's degree at Stephen F. Austin State University.

"While there I never had any problems doing stories," he said of his college experience. "Whenever I got out I didn't anticipate having issues.

"I had a lot of job interviews, but they always found a reason not to hire me," Lawrence said. He was hoping to land a job working on a Web site or doing graphic design work.

"I don't know if they rejected me, per se, but they always hired someone else," he said. Lawrence ended up with a temporary job at a summer camp in New Jersey for children with severe disabilities.

After coming up against obstacles in his own job search, Lawrence decided to return to Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches to take additional courses in social work, education and psychology.

"I wanted to learn more so I could hopefully better the lives of people with disabilities — that's my real goal with this project," Lawrence said of the JobEnable.com Web site.

His opportunity to see that goal become reality arose in October 2006 when he applied for a position with the Longview telecommunications company. As part of the interview process, Lawrence talked with NetworkIP executives who asked him to share his dreams, goals and ideas.

Eric Graves, NetworkIP vice president of business development, said Lawrence's vision did not exactly fit in with NetworkIP's normal scope of business.

"This is completely out of the realm of what we do," Graves said of JobEnable.com. "But we got excited about the possibilities.

Lawrence and Graves are in the process of contacting companies and organizations across the nation that may be hiring and would embrace workers with disabilities. Lawrence said mailings are being done and an e-mail campaign is also going on to contact potential employers for those listing their resumes at no charge.

"Right now we're trying to build the data base," Lawrence said. "Currently, we have a handful of companies offering people work. That will grow as word gets out."

In the next couple of months Graves and Lawrence will also be representing the new Longview-based venture at national conventions, including one in Washington, D.C., where 5,000 people are expected. It will be at that World Conference on Disability Expo where the new Web site will officially be launched.

Graves said many companies and other organizations, such as public universities, are actively seeking handicapped or disabled workers.

Among the companies that have focused on hiring the disabled has been Walgreen's, he said. At one of the company's distribution centers where a concerted effort to hire more disabled workers was followed by a noted increase in efficiency, Graves said.

To better serve the disabled population, he said JobEnable.com is striving to comply with federal Section 508 rules.

That law requires electronic and information technologies developed by the federal government to be accessible to federal employees with disabilities and members of the public with disabilities. "For private sites like ours, Section 508 is not mandatory, but we're striving to maintain and surpass minimum compliance," Graves said.

Each employer signing up for JobEnable.com will receive five free listings on the nationwide Web site. Graves said while the site may never provide a large revenue stream, NetworkIP executives are hoping it eventually covers overhead.

Pete Pattullo, NetworkIP chief executive officer, said the company's leadership feels strongly everyone should have the opportunity to have a job.

"Thousands of very talented individuals like Matt happen to have a disability," Pattullo said. "NetworkIP is proud to support Matt's vision of assisting people with disabilities to obtain employment."

### **At a glance**

What: Web site JobEnable.com

Why: To help individuals with disabilities to attain employment, gaining their independence and reducing reliance on government assistance.

Where: JobEnable.com is a subsidiary of Longview-based NetworkIP, 119 W. Tyler St.

Cost: Disabled people may post their resumes at no cost.

Contact: Matt Lawrence, project manager at: [mlawrence@networkip.net](mailto:mlawrence@networkip.net)

**JobEnable goal**

To enable employers to reach an untapped source of qualified workers. The Web site allows disabled people to post resumes; employers to search a database of resumes and to post job openings on the Web site.