

Great Strides for People with Disabilities
By: Robert Stack

The Governor of the state of Tennessee is making great strides in the educational and disability movement. Returning from my Nashville office to our national headquarters in Princeton, New Jersey, I read with great excitement the support Senator Frist extended to the Governor relative to the SCORE program. Both Senator Frist and I work in the same town; Princeton and we are both strong supporters of some of the work of the Governor.



My background is in disability, which excites me that the Governor has made the executive decision to close Clover Bottom and place the remaining 108 people with developmental disabilities into community based programs. The people that reside in this facility have deserved to live in small residential settings in Tennessee. It should also be noted that the average cost to provide quality services to people with disabilities in community based services are less than half of that in Clover Bottom. It is my suggestion that the Governor continues this momentum and does not stop with Clover Bottom, but extend this program to Green Valley. These institutions are a shameful relic of failed public policy. When I visited Clover Bottom years ago I saw dilapidated, underutilized empty buildings. I was told by my Nashville staff that there are even more there now. The placement of persons with disabilities into the community is a great way to stimulate the economy. This will create real estate opportunities and most importantly jobs. However, the most important benefit will be the people with disabilities that leave Clover Bottom to live full lives in the community.

Finally, the big question is what will be done with Clover Bottom. Having participated in the closure of so many other facilities nationwide I can offer some wonderful options. In Connecticut they placed all the folks with disabilities from their "Clover bottom" and gave it to UCONN. In Pittsburgh the country sold a similar facility to an entrepreneur developer who turned them into beauty condominiums. There are also traditional ideas like prisons and boot camps for scared straight youths. All of these are good things. The closure will be a small, yet significant positive blip on the Nashville scene. I just hope they do better than Princeton. There we closed a facility over 8 years ago. The North Princeton Developmental Center (a tremendous piece of real estate) remains empty and fallow and devoid of the tax role. Don't make the same mistake in the town Senator Frist and I work in. Turn Clover Bottom into an asset. Make some lemonade with those lemons.