

Employment brings Gayla Stock independence

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PANAMA CITY — For Gayla Stock, long-term success is the result of hard work. Stock has been working as a silverware roller at the Outback Steakhouse in Panama City for more than five years, and her disability hasn't slowed her down one bit.

Stock's sister, Diane Randall, says working at Outback has been a positive experience. "She loves to work there."

October is Disability Employment Awareness Month, and the Agency for Persons with Disabilities is highlighting the contributions of people with disabilities to the workforce.

Like most young women, Stock wanted to be independent, have a job, earn her own money. That's when APD stepped in to help her achieve her dream.

By working with an employment liaison and job coach, Stock was able to secure a four-day-a-week position at Outback.

Judith Whittle, job coach at the St. Andrews Bay Center, has worked with Stock on and off in different capacities over the years. For the past five months she's been Stock's personal job coach. Whittle says that she's seen Stock come into her own since working at Outback.

"She's become much more mature," Whittle said. "It's a steady, structured job, which is ideal for her. She's very self-motivated and independent, so she doesn't need a lot of supervision."

Stock has become a fixture at the establishment. In addition to silverware rolling, Stock is also responsible for ensuring the tables in the dining room are properly set up and spotless.

Her manager at Outback, Kristi Williams, considers Stock to be an ideal employee. "She's great to work with, very sweet, and does a great job. She always makes sure the silverware is clean and polished, and that everything is just right."

Despite only being a part-time employee, Outback makes sure that Stock is always included in employee events, such as the holiday parties.

Randall notes that Stock loves the independence her job gives her. "She enjoys having money to spend, and it's given her a sense of pride."

APD supports people with developmental disabilities to live, learn and work in their communities. The agency annually serves more than 50,000 Floridians with autism, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, intellectual disabilities, Down syndrome and Prader-Willi syndrome. For more about the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, visit APDcares.org.