



# EMPOWERED IN THE AISLES

Associates with disabilities are determined to build careers and deliver great customer service.

**MARIANO “NUNI”  
LEBRON JR.**  
Store 288 — Holiday, Florida

“Unstoppable” is how Nuni’s co-workers describe the 17-year Home Depot veteran. Nuni, who has cerebral palsy, has used a wheelchair all his life. He joined THD in 1997 after hearing great things about the Company. “I wanted to work for a company where I could grow,” he said. Since then, he’s built up a loyal base of customers who ask for him by name, earning our Customer Service All-Star recognition four times.

Nuni cruises the aisles in a metallic orange power wheelchair bought with help from co-workers and The Homer Fund. He’s always on the lookout for customers in need and has a few tricks for delivering excellent service. He stocks his apron with frequently requested Plumbing items: thread-seal tape, pipe cutters and plumbers’ putty. He also carries a pen and paper so customers can write down his instructions. “I can write OK, but no one can read it. Like a doctor!” he joked. Nuni has memorized the location and price of almost every product in the store. Plus, he’s bilingual — offering assistance in English and Spanish.

“My mom pushed me at a young age to succeed in life,” he said. “Now, The Home Depot pushes me to succeed. I couldn’t ask for a better company to work for. I know what I know because of the training that I’ve received at The Home Depot. I work with great people, and they’ve shown me that you can overcome any obstacle.”

“The Home Depot pushes me to succeed.”



Nuni’s Customers FIRST approach is appreciated by shoppers and co-workers alike. He has been recognized as a Customer Service All-Star four times.



## JO OWEN

Store 2806 — St. Louis Park, Minnesota



After serving as a captain in the Marine Corps for 10 years, Jo ran inventory teams for a company that serviced The Home Depot. She liked working with THD and applied for a position in Lumber in August 2013. Jo's sight began to fail that October, and after being diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor, she completely lost her vision.

Jo's military training taught her that any obstacle can be overcome with teamwork and training. She worked with store leaders on a plan, and together they determined that the Appliances department would be the best fit for her. Before losing her sight completely, Jo put her photographic memory to good use by mentally cataloging everything she could in the Appliance department. Then her fellow associates labeled products in Braille, which she quickly learned to read.

Soon the Appliance team at Store 2806 was joined by Jo's guide dog, Breena. "THD gave me time to travel to Oregon to train with Breena," Jo explained. "One of the trainers came into the store as part of the course." Co-workers had to learn some rules, too, such as no treats, which can distract Breena from her job. "Now they are all used to her," Jo said. Breena even has two four-legged friends in the store, another guide dog and a diabetic-alert dog.

Jo has led the store in Appliance sales since March, doubling and tripling her sales goals. "Challenges teach us who we are at our core," she said. "They help us find family and friends. Home Depot is my family, and they have supported me every step of the way."

## CHRIS BLAISE

Store 4177 — New Freedom, Pennsylvania



Chris has a self-imposed speed limit of 3 or 4 miles per hour in the aisles. "My power wheelchair can move up to 7½ miles an hour. I have to slow down, especially going around corners, so I don't bump into customers or associates," he said. That's the only slowing down Chris has done since joining THD in 2009 as a cashier.

Chris, who managed a truck terminal before joining THD, was thrown out of a truck when the driver blacked out. "The driver was killed in the crash," Chris said. "I spent two and half years in surgery and rehab and almost didn't make it."

Inspired by his seven children and 11 grandchildren, Chris was determined to return to work, and that determination led him to our Company. "The Home Depot has a cutting-edge attitude in providing work opportunities for the disabled," he said.

After 14 months on the Front End, Chris eventually moved to the Flooring department, where he can do almost anything thanks to his trusty grabber and wheelchair. "My chair can elevate up to 10 inches, so I can pack down and restock shelves," he said.

"Customers are sometimes surprised to see an associate in a wheelchair, but then they realize I'm an expert in Flooring, and I can help them," said Chris, who's working to expand his expertise. Since his accident, he's earned an associate's degree in business management and a bachelor's degree in political science. Now, he's working on his master's degree.

*"The Home Depot has a cutting-edge attitude in providing work opportunities ..."*

## ASHLEY VARDELL

Store 3302 — Henderson, Nevada



Ashley had just finished rebuilding her house in Virginia when she was laid off from her previous job. "I went online to pay my Home Depot bill, and I decided to apply for a job," she said. She interviewed the next day and was hired in phone sales. At that point, she already used a walker to cope with a complicated condition that affects her legs.

Two years later, Ashley moved to Nevada and transferred to Store 3302. She now uses a wheelchair to get around. "The Company has been great," she said. "When I was working at Returns, the store modified the register to make it lower for me." Ashley has a wheelchair on order that will allow her to raise the chair from a seated to a standing position.

It's Customers FIRST in every aisle for Ashley, who loves talking to customers. That

gregariousness is one reason she was elected Miss Wheelchair Nevada 2013, a title that gives her a platform to spread anti-bullying. "I do work with schools, but it's also about not bullying yourself and accepting yourself," she said. "I had to accept my disability. That was hard. The first day I came into the store in a wheelchair, I was embarrassed and in tears."

The wheelchair has given Ashley the freedom she lacked. "As soon as I sat down, I started to live," she said. "I can go places I couldn't before because I couldn't walk."

Ashley is currently studying for her accounting degree. "I do a lot," she said. "Even with my disability, I remodeled a house. I can't even imagine what I would do if I wasn't disabled ... move a mountain probably."