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The Viscardi Center Announces Recipients of the Henry Viscardi Achievement Awards; Slate of awardees includes twelve distinguished leaders of the disability community

2014 Awardees from the United States, Australia and Kazakhstan

May 5, 2014 – The Viscardi Center today announced the recipients for the international **2014 Henry Viscardi Achievement Awards**, which pay tribute to exemplary leaders in the disability community who have had a profound impact on shaping attitudes, raising awareness and improving the quality of life of people with disabilities. Having received nominations from 11 countries, this year's slate of awardees hails from the United States, Australia and Kazakhstan.

The Henry Viscardi Achievement Awards were developed to honor the extraordinary societal contributions of the Awardees in the spirit of the legacy and vision of the Center's founder, Dr. Henry Viscardi, Jr., who himself wore prosthetic legs. As one of the world's leading advocates for people with disabilities, he served as a disability advisor to eight presidents, from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Jimmy Carter. The 2014 Award recipients include:

- Arlene Mayerson – Directing Attorney at Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF)
- Jim Abbott – Former MLB Pitcher & Gold Medal Olympian
- Marca Bristo – President & CEO of Access Living of Metropolitan Chicago
- Rory Cooper, Ph.D. – Distinguished Professor at the University of Pittsburgh
- Maryanne Diamond – General Manager Advocacy and Engagement at Vision Australia

- Neil Jacobson – Founder & CEO of Abilicorp
- Marlee Matlin – Academy Award & Golden Globe Award-winning Actress
- Ron McCallum – Emeritus Professor at Monash University
- Thomas Porter – Volunteer at Walter Reed Army Medical Center
- Susan Sygall - Co-founder & CEO of Mobility International USA (MIUSA)
- Yevgeniy Tetyukhin – Professor at the Petropavlovsk North Kazakhstan State University
- Mary Verdi-Fletcher – President & Founding Artistic Director of Dancing Wheels

“We’re truly honored to bestow upon such a dedicated, diverse and trend-setting group of leaders this year’s Award,” said **John D. Kemp**, President and CEO of The Viscardi Center. “Every day people with disabilities are leaving their footprint in communities all over the world, and their work often transcends the geographical boundaries where they live. The Award recipients challenge us, reminding us all that our work does make a meaningful difference.”

Individuals of any age, with any type of disability, are eligible. The Awards recognize individual, academia, athletic, community, government, nonprofit, military, corporate, and business leaders who are working to improve the lives of people with disabilities.

“It is often said that we, as a society, are at our best when ordinary people do extraordinary things — especially when it comes to making an impact on the world around us,” said **former U.S. Senator Robert Dole**, who co-chaired the Award Selection Committee. “These twelve individuals have demonstrated creativity, determination, ingenuity, leadership, success and tenacity. They embody what people with disabilities can accomplish.”

About the recipients:

- **Arlene Mayerson**

Arlene Mayerson played a pivotal role in drafting of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In a largely behind-the-scenes capacity, she led a legal team that advised Congress, drafted the legislative language, prepared congressional testimony for others, testified before Congress herself, and prepared educational materials for the national disability community. Her intellectual prowess, vision, and tenacity strengthened the law in untold ways and shaped the debate altogether in certain key areas. Ms. Mayerson continues to guide the evolution of the foundational disability civil rights law of which she was a key visionary and architect. In 2012, Ms. Mayerson presented oral argument in a groundbreaking case, *National Association of the Deaf, et al. v. Netflix*, in which a federal court held, for the first time, that internet-only businesses

are covered by the ADA. This decision led to a settlement with Netflix which ensures 100% closed captions in Netflix's On-Demand Streaming Content. Since then, other entertainment streamers have followed suit. In addition to online entertainment, the decision and settlement have implications for the ever-growing provision of education, public benefits, healthcare, and other materials and services through streaming video and other technology. The ability to recognize and respond to such far-reaching issues emerging in disability rights law has been a hallmark of Ms. Mayerson's work throughout her career. In addition to serving as Directing Attorney for Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF) since 1981, Ms. Mayerson has taught Disability Rights law at Berkeley Law for over 25 years, is the author of a 3-part treatise on the ADA, and served on the Civil Rights Review Board of the Department of Education throughout the Clinton Administration.

- **Jim Abbott**

Jim Abbott was born without a right hand, and even with what most would consider a severe disability, he made his way into Major League Baseball as a first-round draft pick. Abbott chose to focus on his ability, rather than his disability, throughout his entire baseball career and constantly urged others to do the same. Abbott won almost 100 games during his illustrious Major League career, the pinnacle of which was his pitching of a no-hitter in 1993. Prior to becoming a Major League pitcher, Abbott pitched the winning game for his country in the 1988 Summer Olympics, and brought home the gold medal for the United States. More recently, Abbott has joined forces with the Professional Baseball Athletic Trainers Society (PBATS), in their groundbreaking initiative to promote the employment of people with disabilities. Abbott is the premiere spokesperson for the "Ability Transcends Challenges" program (ATC).

- **Marca Bristo**

Marca Bristo serves as the President and CEO of Access Living of Metropolitan Chicago; she is also currently the board president of the United States International Council on Disabilities (USICD). As a national disability leader, Bristo is well versed on a wide variety of issues that affect the daily lives and civil rights of people with disabilities, from education to transportation to freedom from institutions. Bristo embraces the international human rights framework and continues to be one of the nation's leading advocates for U.S. engagement with the international community on disability rights. As the former chair of the National Council on Disability, her purview was wide and her commitment to fulfilling this role set the bar high for all succeeding chairs. Bristo is known as a true advocate who will not compromise her values, vision and message. This authentic voice and honest dealing approach has earned the esteem of her colleagues and peers in the movement.

- **Rory Cooper**

Dr. Rory Cooper is a Distinguished Professor at the University of Pittsburg, as well as Senior Research Career Scientist and Director at the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs' Human Engineering Research Laboratories. Since his spinal cord injury over 30 years ago, Dr. Cooper has dedicated his life to improving the lives of people with disabilities; his research initiatives and innovations have spawned companies, additional research and development projects, and served as models for initiatives across the world to further the education, employment, and recreational opportunities for people with disabilities. He has integrated research through clinical practice guidelines and innovative technologies aimed at delivering quality medical rehabilitative care and improving levels of function and independence of persons and Veterans with disabilities. His devices (e.g., Natural Fit Handrim, GameCycle) are used by over one-quarter million people with disabilities, and research equipment he designed (e.g., SMARTWheel, Wheelchair Data-Logger) is being used in nearly 100 laboratories and training facilities around the world.

- **Maryanne Diamond**

Maryanne Diamond has been blind since birth and has held several positions in various organizations, including her current role as General Manager Advocacy and Engagement at Vision Australia. Since 2009, Diamond has spearheaded the World Blind Union's Right to Read campaign to make books more accessible for all print-disabled people around the world. Less than 95% of all published materials (books, magazines, journals etc.) ever get converted into accessible formats (such as large print, Braille, or audio files) for blind, low vision and dyslexic people to be able to read so they can enjoy the same knowledge, literature and culture as their sighted fellow citizens. In June 2013, as a direct result of Diamond's work to unify international copyright laws, over 50 countries signed the Marrakesh Treaty. Diamond's tireless work ensures that more blind youth will be able to read and enjoy the same books as their sighted peers, helping them connect with literature.

- **Neil Jacobson**

Neil Jacobson is not just a passionate advocate for full inclusion of disabled people in their communities; he is a man who leads by example. He co-founded the Computer Technologies Program (CTP) in Berkeley, CA in the 1970s, which has opened doors by providing an accessible training site and curricula allowing many people with disabilities to find successful careers. During his 29-year tenure as Vice President of Technology at Wells Fargo, he exhibited leadership and management skills as well as the kind of knowledge of disability issues that had a profound impact thru out the formidable management structure at the bank. During the Clinton Administration, he was appointed

to serve as Vice Chair of the U.S. President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities. In that role, he forcefully and effectively encouraged people with disabilities to seek work and careers. Now retired from Wells Fargo, Jacobson continues to exert a strong influence on Bay Area businesses thru AbiliCorp, a nonprofit organization he founded that focuses on employment skills training and placement services.

- **Marlee Matlin**

Marlee Matlin is not only the youngest recipient of the Academy Award® for Best Actress; she is the first and only recipient who happens to be deaf. She is also the recipient of Hollywood Foreign Press Association's Golden Globe Award® for Best Actress in a Drama and has received four nominations for an Emmy® Award. She is also a producer, author and advocate for those who are differently abled. She has not only inspired those within the differently abled community with her perseverance and achievement in overcoming barriers, but has inspired millions of abled bodied individuals to consider that the only barriers that we face are not in our limbs, eyes or ears but in our minds. As she outlined in her autobiography "I'll Scream Later," she realized at a very young age that she wanted to tell the world that it was okay to be deaf. Even at ten years old, she was interested in advocacy work when she wrote a letter to then President Gerald Ford that she wanted all television to be closed-captioned. Therefore, it was a proud moment for her when her testimony on Capitol Hill in the 1990's led to the implementation of closed captioning for all broadcast television. She continues to speak out for equality.

- **Ron McCallum**

Ron McCallum is an Emeritus Professor at Monash University. McCallum has been blind almost from birth. In 1993, McCallum was appointed foundation Blake Dawson Waldron Professor of Industrial Law at Sydney University, thus becoming the first completely blind person to be appointed by any university in Australasia to a full professorship in any field. Nine years later, he was appointed to a five-year term as Dean of Law. Later, he became the inaugural President of the Australian Labour Law Association, and Asian regional vice-president of the International Society for Labour and Social Security Law. He has also done significant work for the blind as the Chair of Radio for the Print Handicapped of New South Wales Co-operative Ltd, operator of 2RPH Radio. Since 2006, McCallum has been a member of the Board of Vision Australia. In 2011, he was named Senior Australian of the Year for his untiring pursuit of equal rights for people with disabilities all over the world. Since 2008, McCallum has been actively involved with the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

- **Thomas Porter**

Tom, a Korean War combat-wounded double amputee, and his wife, Eleanor, the U.S. Army physical therapist who treated him, "*have been a quiet, yet powerful force for change and enhanced opportunities,*" notes John Farley, retired federal judge, himself a combat-wounded amputee and mentee. The pattern of the Porters' twice weekly personal visits at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. over the past eight years, is remarkable both for its consistency and its effectiveness: thousands who have come through the Center remember the Porters with gratitude. According to exit polls, their peer visitation, and the visits of those who have followed their example, is the hospital's most effective patient services program. Congresswoman Tammy Duckworth, an Iraq war amputee, can testify to the effectiveness of the Porters' visits recalling, "*The sight of Tom looking down at us, even as we struggle to comprehend our surroundings, brings a serenity that is a lifeline.*" Instructors themselves, the Porters helped establish training through the Amputee Coalition of America significantly boosting the number of amputee peer visitors.

- **Susan Sygall**

Susan Sygall is an internationally recognized expert and visionary leader in the areas of international educational exchange and leadership programs for persons with disabilities. Sygall has had a personal and professional commitment to disability rights and women's issues for more than 30 years. In 1981, she co-founded and continues to serve as CEO of Mobility International USA (MIUSA). MIUSA's vision is reflective of Sygall's vision to ensure a just, accessible and inclusive community in which the human rights, citizenship, contribution and potential of people with disabilities are recognized and celebrated. MIUSA's programs are reflective of Sygall's commitment to improving the quality of life of people with disabilities around the globe. Through Sygall's leadership, MIUSA's programs increase disability inclusion in international exchange, grassroots disability leadership and the development process.

- **Yevgeniy Tetyukhin**

Yevgeniy Tetyukhin's work on disability started when Kazakhstan gained its independence 22 years ago. Before that time, people with disabilities were considered invisible by the Soviet Power, though there were millions of them. Tetyukhin was one of them, contracting polio at the age of three. Nevertheless, Tetyukhin earned his Ph.D. and later earned his university professorship. He is an international wheelchair racer and a two-time paralympian (Sydney and Athens), having founded North Kazakhstan Club for Disable Sports and North Kazakhstan Association of Disable Sports. He has carried his inspiration outside the sporting arena by teaching disability as a part of diversity and multiculturalism within the framework of the subject "American Studies at

North Kazakhstan State University. In 2013, Tetyukhin served as a Fulbright scholar at the Center of Disability Studies at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Upon his return to Kazakhstan, he started a Support Center for students with disabilities. To that end, he is teaching people with disabilities to not only become self-advocates, but also to develop leadership qualities.

- **Mary Verdi-Fletcher**

In this day and age, it is hard to truly classify anyone as a pioneer, yet Mary Verdi-Fletcher embodies it in every sense of the word. Verdi-Fletcher, America's first professional wheelchair dancer, has taken a field where disabilities were not accepted and worked endlessly to shatter stereotypes, change attitudes, bring hope, advocate for inclusion, and essentially be an agent of change. Having been born with spina bifida, she wanted to open the doors of opportunity for people with disabilities who wanted to pursue their goals on an equal ground with their non-disabled peers. This determination ultimately led her to found The Dancing Wheels Company in 1980 in Cleveland, Ohio, which was specifically formed to employ professionally trained dancers, with and without disabilities. The Dancing Wheels Company have reached audiences of over 5 million people with awe-inspiring school assembly programs, workshops, residencies, and main stage concert performances worldwide. These extraordinary numbers represent normal citizens that are touched by Mary's dream of making the arts accessible to all people of all abilities.

The Selection Committee, co-chaired by former **U.S. Senator Robert Dole** and the **Honorable Luis Gallegos**, Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the United Nations in Geneva, included **Rohini Anand**, Senior Vice President and Global Chief Diversity Officer at Sodexo, **Rosangela Berman Bieler**, Senior Adviser on Children with Disabilities at UNICEF (*2013 Henry Viscardi Achievement Award recipient*), **Cari Dominguez**, former Chair of the U. S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, **Sherwood D. Goldberg, Esq.** (Col. Ret), Senior Advisor for Asian Affairs at the Center for Naval Analysis, **Hiro Itoh**, President & CEO of Abilities of Japan, **Axel Leblois**, President & CEO of the Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTS (G3ict), **Inmaculada Placencia Porrero**, Deputy Head of Unit for Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Directorate-General for Justice of the European Commission, **Patrick Rummerfield**, Director-Patient Liaisons at the International Center for Spinal Cord Injury at the Kennedy-Krieger Institute (*2013 Henry Viscardi Achievement Award recipient*), **James Sinocchi**, Director, Workforce Communications at IBM, and **Nina Viscardi**, special art educator/art therapist.

For more information about the Awards, this year's awardees, and the 2015 Henry Viscardi Achievement Awards which will be announced in October 2014, visit www.viscardiawards.org.

The Viscardi Center provides Pre-K through High School education, school-to-work transition services, vocational training, career counseling and placement, assistive technology and workforce diversification assistance to children, adolescents, and adults with disabilities and businesses. A global leader, it employs more than

300 professionals, including experts in education, human resources and technology. Learn more at viscardicenter.org.

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