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**The Arc of Texas Virginia Eernisse Legacy Award Recipient Announced**

Ricky Broussard recognized for his influential leadership and contributions to full community inclusion for Texans with intellectual and developmental disabilities

 **(AUSTIN, TEXAS, 09/01/2021)** The Arc of Texas is honored to announce Ricky Broussard, of Texas City, Texas, as the 2021 Virginia Eernisse Legacy Award recipient. Broussard, an Imagine Enterprises Peer Support Specialist and experienced disability rights advocate, is dedicated to encouraging participation in policymaking, so the needs and rights of the disability community are accurately represented, and empowering others with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) to live more independent, self-directed lives.

“Ricky Broussard is a living example of everything there is to know and learn about self-determination,” said Imagine Enterprise’s Norine Gill. “Ricky makes the world a better place for everyone, and especially individuals with IDD who can see that life can and will get better when self-advocacy and self-determination are the cornerstone of daily practice and support.”

Professionally, Broussard provides support and training to young adults with IDD through Imagine Enterprise’s Pre-Employment Transition services. His personal experience informs his training. At age 10, he had to leave his home because it was not accessible, and for the next 29 years he lived in four different institutions.

“While I was there, the psychiatrist said I would only be good to work in a sheltered workshop for the rest of my life,” said Broussard. He worked for a sheltered workshop where he placed nuts and bolts on a pole and earned $2.50 every two weeks.

“Sometimes I was never sure that I would get a real job and move out on my own,” he said. He shared his goals with The Arc of Texas and Imagine Enterprises, and ultimately moved into his own apartment, purchased his own accessible van, hired his own staff, and got hired for a job of his choosing.

Broussard is also a champion of disability rights at the Texas Capitol. In 2013, the Ricky Broussard Act was signed into law. The law provides that improved and consistent transition services be available to high schoolers regardless of their school district, thus increasing the likelihood of graduates obtaining post-secondary education and employment opportunities.

“’Ricky's Bill’ is a testament to his belief that all young people with IDD can be fully included in the community, the workplace and typical places to live—with the right supports in place,” said Gill. “Years of work on self-determination, person centered planning, employment and self-advocacy makes Ricky a leader in Texas and across the nation.”

Broussard’s reach extends as far as the Virgin Islands, participating in as many conferences and speaking engagements as he can.

The Arc of Texas CEO Jennifer Martinez said, “Hundreds of Texans have enjoyed working alongside Ricky or being his mentee, but thousands more people have benefited from his decades of grassroots advocacy work.”

Broussard will be honored during The Arc of Texas’s Boots & BBQ event on September 24, 2021, at the Wildflower Center in Austin, Texas. For tickets, go to www.thearcoftexas.org/bootsbbq.

**About The Arc of Texas Virginia Eernisse Legacy Award**

Mrs. Virginia Eernisse, who passed away in 2018, believed in self-advocacy and compassionately supported and zealously advocated for individuals to have access to the supports and services needed to live well in the community. Among her accomplishments, she was appointed to the board that oversaw the closure of two state-supported living centers (SSLCs), and spearheaded the establishment of The Arc of the Gulf Coast. Virginia was a founding member of Imagine Enterprises, a nonprofit focused on the delivery of services to promote self-determination through employment and authority over one's resources. She was also an outspoken advocate for disability rights at the Texas State Capitol.

**About The Arc of Texas**

The Arc of Texas promotes, protects, and advocates for the human rights and self-determination of Texans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

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