



## Minnesota Resident Receives 2011 Shining Star of Perseverance National Award

*Assurant Employee Benefits Honors Jennifer Mundl for Overcoming Obstacles, Helping Others Thrive*

**Kansas City, Mo., Oct. 4, 2011** – Jennifer Mundl was only 17 when a gymnastics accident resulted in a severe spinal cord injury that left her a ventilator-dependent quadriplegic. Despite a lengthy hospitalization and recovery, she completed her bachelor's and master's degrees and went on to help develop the assistive technology practice at Minnesota-based Courage Center. Today, she joins the ranks of Aron Ralston, Senator Bob Dole, Chris Waddell and J.R. Martinez as a Shining Star of Perseverance Honoree, awarded by Assurant Employee Benefits.

Mundl earned the distinction because of the fortitude and determination she has demonstrated since a 1982 accident left her paralyzed from the neck down. The award also recognizes her work at Courage Center, where she helps others who are disabled realize their full potential, her ongoing efforts in assistive technology and her unique attitude.

"There are no disabilities, but rather varying abilities," Mundl said. "I have always looked beyond a disability and focused on what a person can do. Everyone is unique and everyone is a gift. Through creativity and knowledge we all can impact the world today."

Assurant Employee Benefits presented the award to launch National Disability Employment Awareness Month, which Congress enacted in 1945 to raise awareness about disability employment issues, and to celebrate the many and varied contributions of America's workers with disabilities.

Now in its ninth year, the Shining Star of Perseverance award was created by Assurant Employee Benefits to recognize the challenges that come with disability. A disability insurance provider, Assurant Employee Benefits is committed to helping claimants return to work, and consistently earns high marks in industry studies on claimant satisfaction.

"Shining Star is a reflection of Assurant Employee Benefit's culture and our commitment to help those facing disabilities continue leading productive, meaningful lives," Assurant Employee Benefits president and CEO John Roberts said. "Mundl exemplifies a true Shining Star. Thanks to her unwavering perseverance, she has overcome countless obstacles and continues to inspire those she interacts with every day. We can all learn from her example."

The national unemployment rate in August for those with disabilities was 16.1 percent, as reported by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. In that same period, the labor force included 21 percent of people with disabilities as compared to 69.9 percent without disabilities. Though disabled workers represent a highly skilled talent pool that can help employers compete in today's global economy, employment barriers still exist and must be addressed, according to the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy.

In various industry studies, more than 90 percent of individuals out on disability indicated they would return to work if they could. That's why Assurant Employee Benefits developed its return-to-work program, a critical part of its disability business, to provide the support that customers and their employers need to get back to work and to life after injury or illness.

"It takes a village for anyone with or without a disability," Mundl said. "We all have our personal issues, mine was medical, but other employees have life events – like divorce, child illness, injuries, financial problems and other responsibilities – that impair their capability to work. It is about what we do with our life and how we react to roadblocks in front of us."

In addition to receiving this year's Shining Star of Perseverance award, which was designed by Donna Smith of Colchester, Conn., herself a quadriplegic, Roberts presented a donation to Mundl's employer Courage Center.

#### **About Assurant Employee Benefits**

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