

Pathfinders honors an ally...

“The Pathfinders Employee Resource Group recognizes Melissa Baumann for superior and passionate service assisting employees with disabilities to obtain access to the full privileges of employment with the US Forest Service....”

That’s an excerpt from a letter of appreciation to Melissa Baumann of the Forest Products Lab and the Forest Service Union, honoring her work to ensure that workable reasonable accommodations directives are published in a usable format, and that they will be updated in a final version as USDA regulations unfold. Melissa served as the lead Union representative on a committee appointed to address this critical need. Jerry Smith, Pathfinders chair, also served on the negotiations committee.

The directives, which most units “live or die” by, codify procedures we must take in our jobs. It has been said, “if it doesn’t exist in the directives, it doesn’t exist in the Forest Service.”



Ron Thatcher, National Federation of Federal Employees president, made the presentation before senior Forest Service and Union leaders at the Forest Service Partnership Council meeting in Tallahassee, Florida. Shown above are Melissa and Ron during the presentation. Facilitator Karol Kuhn stands at far left.

Presented with the letter was a token of appreciation -- a Louis Braille commemorative silver dollar.



The coin features a full size, accessible Braille depiction of the letters Brl (short for braille, which provides people with visual disabilities access to the written word).

The coin is one of only 400,000 such collectible coins struck by the US Mint. By the way, proceeds from purchase of the coin go to Braille literacy efforts, and the Braille figure on the coin (BRL, for Braille) is actual braille size.

It was carefully selected as a token for Melissa, and we hope that she will “see” it as a sincere expression of how much we appreciate her work to provide accessibility literacy in the US Forest Service. The presentation was funded by member donations.

The Pathfinders organization wanted to recognize Melissa’s outstanding contribution as the lead Union representative on the committee appointed by the FS Partnership Council to resolve issues and develop policy regarding the Reasonable Accommodation process.

Jerry Smith, Pathfinders Chair.