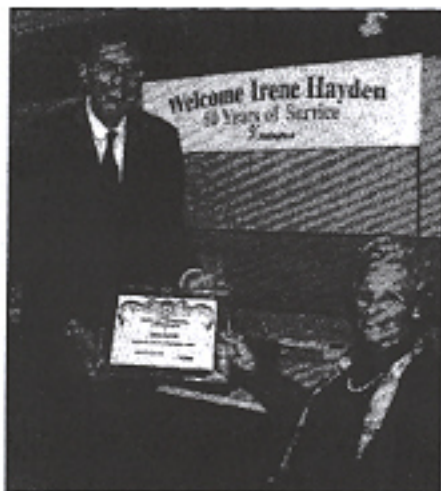


Wheelchair User, Irene Hayden, Celebrates Fifty Years of Employment with Abilityfirst

Wheelchair user Irene Hayden first started with AbilityFirst in 1956 as a receptionist when it was known as the Crippled Children's Society of Southern California. On February 16, 2006 she celebrated 50 years of employment with the agency, which serves children and adults with physical and developmental disabilities.

"I consider working for AbilityFirst as my service to the disability community," says Irene, who is now Senior Receptionist.

Hayden was given the red carpet treatment when she arrived for work on February 16. The ramp from her van opened up onto a red carpet, which was laid out to go from her handicapped parking space to the front door. As employees, friends and relatives applauded Irene pressed the lever of her electric wheelchair and traveled down the red carpet. Singing popular songs creatively edited for the event, AbilityFirst employees were joined by some members of her family, who came in for the occasion includ-



Mayor Bill Bogaard, City of Pasadena and Irene Hayden

ing her son Steve from Spokane, Washington; daughter Diane from Salt Lake City, Utah; and grandson Dwayne from Huntington Beach, California.

AbilityFirst employees created a scrapbook for her that was filled with photos, drawings and poems recalling fifty years of memories. CEO Lori Gangemi praised her for her commitment to AbilityFirst and

presented her with a bouquet of flowers as the crowd cheered.

Later that day Mayor Bill Bogaard from the City of Pasadena dropped by to congratulate her and give her a special accommodation from the City. Congressman Adam Schiff sent a congressional certificate to honor her as well, which was delivered by Field Representative Teresa Lamb Simpson from the Congressman's office. As a special long-term honor for Irene's service to AbilityFirst, the agency placed a plaque in the lobby designating it as the "Irene Hayden Reception Area."

Irene Hayden became a victim of polio when she was four. When she first started with the agency she utilized crutches for support. Irene will be 80 years old in April 2006. She is an example of the loyalty and reliability that can be expected from a person with disabilities. Irene dispels the fears of employing people with disabilities and is a shining example of the contributions individuals with disabilities can make in the workplace.