

# 2011 Robert Ross MDA National Personal Achievement Award Recipient

## Thomas Hale Arrington III

### Home and Family

Thomas Arrington III, 48, lives in Chesapeake, Va., with his wife, Sandra. He has four sons: Thomas Arrington IV, 28; Phillip, 18; Travis, 16; and Chase, 3.

### Professional and Community Achievements

Arrington worked for 23 years with the natural gas industry in New York, retiring in 2002 as manager of gas distribution systems for most of the New York City and Long Island areas.

In 2002, he earned a bachelor's degree in business education and went on to found Atlantic Wind Energy, a company that promotes use of renewable forms of energy.

After moving with his family to Virginia because New York's cold winters exacerbated the effects of his facioscapulohumeral muscular dystrophy (FSHD), Arrington devoted himself to helping others. He was appointed to the Mayor's Council on Disabilities in Chesapeake and is an outspoken advocate for accessible public buildings and public transportation.

In 2010, Arrington was selected to participate in Virginia's prestigious Sorensen Institute for Political Leadership, which identifies, educates and trains emerging leaders from around the state. His goal is to learn how to better use the political process to open opportunities for those with disabilities.

### Personal History

An enthusiastic baseball, basketball and football player, Arrington learned at age 26 that he has FSHD when its symptoms began making him fall. FSHD also affected his father, although not until he was 48.

FSHD initially causes weakness and atrophy of the muscles around the eyes and mouth, and of the shoulders, upper arms and lower legs, with later weakness of abdominal muscles and sometimes hip muscles. Arrington relies on a power wheelchair for mobility. When FSHD made it impossible to use his right hand, he taught himself to write with his left.

The father of a 3-year-old son, Arrington says he does "daddy day care" at home, where he also operates his business. His wife, Sandra, works full time for the federal government and also serves as her husband's caregiver.

### MDA Leadership

In addition to his disability advocacy work, running his business and caring for his son, Arrington devotes significant time to MDA fundraising events.

As recipient of MDA's 2011 Robert Ross National Personal Achievement Award, Arrington will continue his tradition of service to MDA by supporting and representing the Association at many disability awareness events and fundraisers.

His selection for the award was announced on the 2010 Jerry Lewis MDA Telethon.

### Words to Live By

"I'm inspired by the upbeat attitude and positive outlook of people whose disabilities are far more debilitating than mine," Arrington says.

"I'm determined to show others that, no matter your physical disability, if you maintain your fortitude and a smile on your face, that's all you need to effect positive change in society. Mobility and social interaction — and not just with others who have disabilities — can move mountains, and I try to demonstrate that by personal example."

