

Telamon—Virginia

August 2015

Empowering Individuals, Improving Communities

Message from the State Director Sharon Saldarriaga

I am pleased to report that Telamon was awarded funding from the Department of Labor under the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) for the National Farmworker Jobs Program to continue provision of training, employment, and support activities.

We are very excited to implement the new provisions under WIOA, and we are very pleased to know that we can continue to operate other programs made possible by this funding. Virginia's agricultural community and others around the nation will continue to benefit from the vital services this program provides.

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Christina Alvarez

By Sara Lopez
Workforce Development
Specialist, Montross

Christina Alvarez stepped into our office two years ago and was found eligible for the National Farmworker Jobs Program. Her family's main source of income was from farmwork. She wanted a better future for herself and her family.

Christina attended college in the past, but due to her financial situation, she was unable to finish. We immediately began career assessments and went over many career options with Christina. Christina stated that she had always been interested in the health care field and she decided to go into a nursing program. We assisted her with needs related payments, child care, and supportive services throughout her journey of reaching her goal of obtaining her associates degree in nursing.

It took a lot of hard work and dedication, but with the help of our counseling and encouragement, Christina followed through and achieved her goal! Afterwards, we helped her with job search and development activities. She quickly got 5 job interviews and is now



working at her dream job as a Registered Nurse. With our assistance, Christina was able to purchase all of the clothing and supplies needed for her new job.

Christina's starting wage is \$22.77/hour. Staff frequently follows up with Christina and each time we ask how her job is going, she always speaks about how much she loves working there and how thankful she is for this amazing opportunity. Congratulations, Christina! We are so proud of you!



Home, Sweet Home

By Tytiana Dennis
Housing Counselor

Telamon maintains an office in Danville, Virginia from which our certified Housing Counselor, Tytiana Dennis, provides an extensive array of counseling services for homeowners, homebuyers, and renters. Tytiana worked for Telamon from 2007 to 2011 when our housing office was located in Chatham, Virginia, and she returned over a year ago to join us again when we moved the office to Danville. In the last three months, there were many successful outcomes from Tytiana's efforts, and we would like to share a few.



Lease-Purchase. Britney W. is a single mother of a 3 year old boy and a brand new baby girl. She has been living with her parents, but wants to purchase a home for her family. This would be her first home purchase and the idea is a little scary, especially considering Britney is a recent graduate and will be starting a new career.

Telamon's lease-purchase program is a great fit for Britney because she has some credit problems. The program allows clients to live in a home for 2 years while building or repairing credit. Also, the program gives clients a feeling of ownership and commitment.

Through the program, Tytiana will work with Britney to develop and maintain a budget, and help her stay on track for making a purchase. The lease-purchase program includes quarterly inspections of the property, maintenance, and upkeep. Telamon congratulates Britney on planning for the future of her growing family.

Credit Counseling. Carolyn G. is on a fixed income. When she contacted Telamon, she was not sure exactly what her credit report said. When Tytiana ran Carolyn's

credit, it showed "insufficient credit to score" and the report listed over \$19,000 in debts, 95% of which were medical bills. Tytiana's review revealed that the credit report was inaccurate because Carolyn had Medicare/Medicaid and her bills should have been covered. Tytiana contacted each creditor, provided them with Carolyn's insurance information, and requested that the outstanding bills be settled correctly. After 45 days, Tytiana pulled a new credit report: Carolyn's score is now 589 and more than \$10,000 of the debt has been cleared! Carolyn is ecstatic. Once all the items have been processed by the creditors, her score should be even higher.

Foreclosure Prevention. When Frances E. contacted Telamon, she was behind with her mortgage and feared foreclosure. Tytiana assisted her to restructure her budget and set up direct deposits to a savings account. Together they developed an action plan and succeeded in obtaining a loan modification that extended her terms, lowered her interest rate by 2%, and reduced her monthly payments.

Workshops. A number of highly successful workshops were managed by Tytiana, including a Pre-Purchase workshop with 17 participants in Ringgold, VA; a Post-Purchase workshop for each person who recently bought a home from Telamon; and a Seniors workshop with 9 participants in South Hill, VA.



Pre-Purchase. Congratulations to John R. on his recent purchase of a Telamon home located on WI Powell Road in Dry Fork, VA. John is a single father of a toddler boy. John was able to take advantage of HOME Funds and Down Payment Assistance to make his dream of homeownership come true. John looks forward to a great future in his new home. He is engaged and planning a wedding in Spring 2016.

Kevin Portillo

By Lorena McQueen
Workforce Development
Specialist, Harrisonburg

Kevin Portillo came to our Telamon office in Harrisonburg, Virginia because he was unemployed and distressed about how to support his two kids who were in school. He had previously been working at Pilgrim's Pride collecting eggs. He did not have any other type of job experience and he was hoping we could help him build new skills to find better employment.

We worked with Kevin to determine his eligibility for the National Farmworker Jobs Program. Once he was enrolled, we guided him through the procedures and offered him emotional support to boost his courage, build his confidence, and maintain his motivation. We provided Kevin with tools and information to better understand his strengths, his goals, and a pathway to success. He completed an initial assessment, which included a career evaluation. We introduced him to the services available at the One-Stop. We provided him with Financial Aid information, and we explained to him about the labor market. We also taught him and assisted him in performing job searches.

After the evaluations, Kevin decided that the best path for him was to pursue a career in welding, but he needed additional assistance to reach that goal. We guided him with our support and worked with

him step-by-step to develop realistic plans. We systematically addressed each barrier between him and economic stability.

Together, we decided the best option was for Kevin to enroll in classes that provided rapid training for welders at the Blue Ridge Community College (BRCC). Kevin signed a Classroom Training Contract with Telamon and was able to receive emergency assistance with utilities and supportive payments each week to help him out while he was taking classes.

The welding classes ran from August 2014 until December 23, 2014. Kevin successfully completed the course. His graduation was a major accomplishment in his life and provided motivation to other farmworkers that Kevin knew. Kevin said, "I want my kids to see what I can accomplish. I want them to be proud of me."

Telamon staff continued to coach Kevin, creating trust and empowering him to build on his own success. Kevin was hired as a full-time employee at Graham Plastic Products, Inc. making \$11.50 per hour plus full medical benefits. This job is a great step forward for Kevin, giving him better income, stability, direct hands-on experience, and an opportunity to develop the soft skills he will need for a long career.

Kevin told us how much he appreciated all the assistance offered by Telamon through the NFJP program, "Now, I have enough money to support my kids."

Staff Notes

July first marks the beginning of many of our grant programs and is traditionally a time when we implement organizational and staffing changes.

VA08 South Hill: 434-447-7134

Carolyn Walker retires 7/31/2015 (see article on page 4). If you need assistance on any matter formerly handled by Carolyn, you should call the South Hill office and ask to speak to **Richard Ruffin**, Weatherization Supervisor/Energy Auditor.



Wendy McRae was re-hired on 7/1/2015 as Secretary. She said, "I'm very excited to be back working with my Telamon family!" She worked for us from 2009-2013, but had to leave due to a reduction in funding.



Zachery Merkle was hired on 2/20/2015 as Construction Worker.

VA01 Richmond: 804-355-4676

We are in the process of reorganizing. Presently, all housing-related inquiries should be addressed to State Director, **Sharon Saldarriaga**.

Office Closures

Three temporary and part-time NFJP offices have been closed: Waynesboro, Eastern Shore, and Winchester. Any inquiries should be addressed to **Nelson Diaz**, Program Coordinator, 804-240-6792.

Thank You

By Chris Hicks
Administrative Assistant



Have you ever met someone for the first time and had an immediate sense of friendship and acceptance? We hear about “love at first sight,” but I’m not sure there’s even a word or phrase for “friends at first meeting.” It doesn’t sound very poetic, so I guess they left that one out of the books.

Well, I’d like to tell you about a person I met through Telamon that did make me feel welcome and valued from the very first minute. You probably know this person, too. If you don’t, then I feel sad for you because you have truly missed a rewarding experience. Unfortunately, there isn’t much time left for you to meet her on the job: Carolyn Walker will be celebrating her last day with Telamon on July 31st, 2015.

Celebrating? Yes, I know that sounds odd. In truth, she is very sad to be leaving us after more than 30 years of service. But if there’s one thing I do know about Carolyn, it’s that she won’t be moping around on her last day. No matter how sad the occasion, I’ve seen Carolyn reach deep inside herself to find a spark of hope and goodwill, and to share that with the people around her. I expect nothing less on her last day.

It’ll be hard for her and everyone in VA08 South Hill - they

form a very tightly knit family. There will probably be a fair amount of crying, red eyes, and

wet hankies; but, if Carolyn is there, joy will be there, too. It’s always a celebration when family comes together to work as a team, remember the good times, acknowledge the challenges, and say “THANK YOU” to a member who has served faithfully and joyfully, and is now ready to move on with our blessings.

When I was preparing to write this article to announce Carolyn’s retirement, I realized I didn’t know a lot of facts about Carolyn’s 30 years here at Telamon. I’ve known her for only one-tenth of that amount of time and find it hard to imagine all that she has seen and done. I called her to get some details for the newsletter. I said, “Carolyn, will you tell me about the highlights of your career with Telamon? What is it that you would most like to be remembered for?” I don’t think Carolyn realized how much she surprised me by her answers.

Carolyn is a very sincere, compassionate, and capable leader. I had expected she would tell me about all the professional deeds she had completed: the accomplishments, accolades, committees, services, achievements, awards, and maybe a personal bragging point or two.

Instead, Carolyn began telling me about a woman who lived in Lunenburg county, a woman who’s house had dirt floors. The house had no windows; only garbage bags kept the wind out. There was no bathroom, not even running water. Through the Indoor Plumbing Repair program, Carolyn and the VA08 South Hill team of Telamon were able to provide everything this woman needed to update her home.

I had asked Carolyn to tell me the highlights of her career, and instead of asking to be remembered for her professional achievements, she asked me to share some of these stories about how the work we do touches the lives of people who are often in desperate need. Once she started, Carolyn couldn’t choose which story summed it up best and kept talking until emotion choked her words to silence. I’m a stodgy old curmudgeon, but Carolyn’s humility, honesty, and decency moved me to tears.

Carolyn said that more than anything, she wanted to be remembered as belonging to the family of people who work together in South Hill and to thank them for their dedication. She wanted to thank me for talking to her, and she wanted to thank Sharon Saldarriaga for all the fierce support she has provided over the years. And to me, that sums up the kind of person Carolyn is. When we are trying to thank her, she’s busy giving it all back. Goodbye, Carolyn. We love you!