

Telamon—Virginia

February 2015

Empowering Individuals, Improving Communities

Message from the State Director Sharon Saldarriaga

I would like to wish everyone a very successful and happy New Year. As we enter 2015, we greet this year with much good news that can benefit those we serve.

In February, Telamon Corporation will celebrate fifty years of successfully helping disadvantaged families. From the organization's humble beginnings in North Carolina with programs that focused on farmworkers, today we operate over 100 projects that bring needed services to a wide range of recipients in twelve states.

We're excited about the President's State of the Union address in which he proposed making community college free for those who maintain grades in good standing. The cost of college poses significant barriers for many of those wishing to attend

(Continued on page 3)

In this issue

Success Story: <i>Edwin Figueroa</i>	1
<i>Good Things Come</i>	2
Staff Notes	3
Success Story: <i>Marisela Ochoa</i>	4

Edwin Figueroa

By Lorena McQueen
Workforce Development
Specialist, Harrisonburg

When Edwin Figueroa first came to our Harrisonburg office, he felt sad about the many challenges he faced. He told us his primary concern was finding work so he could support his family (wife, Lilibeth, and two stepchildren: Angeline Marie, 14, and Zadiel, 10). He was unemployed and having difficulty getting another job due to limited English proficiency, lack of sufficient work history, and lack of transportation. Most recently, he had worked at the Cargill hatchery gathering turkey eggs.

Edwin did have a high school diploma, but needed help with his English skills, job hunting, and making ends meet until he could find stable employment allowing self-sufficiency. Before giving assistance, Telamon evaluated Edwin to determine his eligibility for our program, discover his occupational strengths, and to determine which type of support would best meet his needs. We worked with the Department of Social Services to establish Medicaid and nutrition



assistance for Edwin's family. We helped him develop his resume and search for jobs. We referred him to prospective employers and assisted him with his job applications. Edwin received occupational skills training, pre-employment training, and English-as-a-second-language training. We also assisted him with transportation while he was searching for work, often taking him to places he needed to go.

Because he knew his family needed steady income to survive, Edwin was highly motivated to find work as quickly as possible.

(Continued on page 4)

Good Things Come to Those Who are *Made to Wait*

By Douglas Kendall Adams
Workforce Development
Specialist, Danville

When Stephen Haynes stepped through the doors of the Danville office of Telamon Corporation in September of 2014, he was stressed, depressed, and in dire straits. He had not been employed since 2012 when he lost his job of 18 years as a Mechanical Engineer with the City of Danville due to some issues that resulted in his inability to drive for the City. The only type of employment that Stephen could find after he lost his job was working on a tobacco farm where he planted and pulled tobacco; however, he knew that his time was limited as the tobacco season was quickly coming to a close and he was barely surviving on the little bit of money that he was making working on the farm.

Trying to figure out what he was going to do, Stephen turned to his sister, Teresa Romero, a former Telamon customer, for advice. She suggested he could possibly benefit from the help and support that Telamon offers to each and every customer who enrolls in the National Farmworker Jobs Program; and that's exactly what Stephen did.

After he enrolled in the program and completed testing and

assessments, Stephen and his Workforce Development Specialist (WDS) sat and had a discussion about what it was that he wanted to do. Stephen was very adamant about finding full-time employment as he had already been to college and received his degree in Mechanical Engineering. He also stated that he was confident in his qualifications, skills, experience, and knowledge to land a job and get back on his feet. Stephen said that he didn't have a problem finding job opportunities and landing interviews; his qualifications and experience were selling him to employers. In fact, before he came to Telamon, he had many opportunities where he interviewed with hiring employers and got as far as the second interview with them, but there was still a problem. He was haunted by the history of those events that led to him losing his driving privileges. That history kept him from getting hired, and was blocking him from a career where he could make the money he deserved.

After multiple assessments and one-on-one meetings, Stephen and his WDS developed a strong individualized employment plan that would help address some of the challenges that he was facing. His individualized employment plan included job readiness training, interview training, and mock inter-

views. Also, support services for gas and housing assistance were given. Telamon spent several hours with Stephen doing job search as well as applying for jobs online. When Stephen was not in the office doing workshops or job search, he spent his time on the phone following up with employers where he had recently applied. There were many times Stephen felt he was never going to find a job and would start to slip right back into the slump he was in when he first walked through the doors of Telamon. But, whenever he began to feel himself slip into the slump, he would call his WDS and talk about whatever it was that was bothering him. With positive reinforcement from his WDS, Stephen didn't give up. He would pick himself up and continue doing everything that he could to stay positive, engaged, and hopeful.

At the beginning of January, Stephen got hired full-time at Tune & Toler, Incorporated making \$18.00 dollars an hour as a plumber as well as an overseer of construction projects. Boy was Stephen excited! Stephen had waited a long time - had been *made to wait* by circumstances. He was overjoyed when his patience and hard work were rewarded.

Staff Notes

Telamon welcomes some new faces to our staff in Virginia: Jose Sierra, Program Counselor in Harrisonburg, and Carolyn Harris, Field Service Representative in Waynesboro. Also, we wish to congratulate Lorena McQueen on her recent promotion to Workforce Development Specialist II.

We always try to share our client's stories of success in the National Farmworker Jobs Program, when education and training lead to new job opportunities. In this issue, we'd like to share a personal story told by Jose.



My name is Jose M. Sierra, Program Counselor for Telamon located in Harrisonburg, VA. I'm currently studying

at Blue Ridge Community College and a proud father of two. I'm the second of three brothers, born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, where I lived until the age of five. Raised in a very humble and affectionate apartment home, in Brooklyn, NY, respect and caring for others was taught by example at a very young age by my Mother. She was the backbone of our family as she worked as a single mother to provide for her siblings in a new country.

Adapting to a new country brings a lot of difficult challenges

that I've had to endure. The language barrier, adopting a new culture, and getting used to new laws are just a few obstacles I had to face. With time, I was able to overcome those challenges and adapt to the fast life of New York City. I did pretty well in school but the necessities forced me to start working at the age of fourteen at a store nearby. And two years later, I had to drop out of High School.

Not having a High School Diploma made it hard to find good employment opportunities. I had to settle for minimum wage working under tough conditions. I always knew that I was capable of performing other things, that I had a different purpose. I wanted to provide something not just to my family but to my community. And with the busy work schedule, getting back to school and working on a G.E.D. was impossible. Overwhelmed by the fast life of New York City, I found myself searching for a new home. I later moved to Harrisonburg, Virginia. After a six-year absence from school, I enrolled in Massanutten Technical Center where I was able to acquire my G.E.D.

Having a G.E.D alone has opened various opportunities for me. Being hired by Telamon Corporation is definitely one of the most significant. Telamon's work schedule enables me to pursue a career in college. Although I have not chosen a major, whatever I pursue will allow me to make significant contributions to the community as we do here at Telamon.

State Director's Message

(Continued from page 1)

and this will improve access for millions of people who currently face economic challenges to secondary education. This also will enable the number of farmworkers we serve through the National Farmworker Jobs Program to enter college.

In addition, this year will mark the transition of new workforce development legislation, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which takes effect on July 1st. The enactment of WIOA will provide a greater opportunity to link the American Job Center system with the needs of employers to better prepare workers for jobs that are available in today's current and future labor market.

On behalf of Telamon Corporation staff in Virginia, I extend our best wishes to you in this new year and invite you to spend some time learning more about our programs on our website www.telamon.org or to visit one of our offices. It would be our pleasure to welcome you and share more information about our career exploration, job training, pesticide safety, energy conservation, and housing counseling programs.

Cover Story

(Continued from page 1)

We helped him make applications at numerous employers in the area, and he said he would probably want to take the first job he could find, that he did not want to pass any opportunity to get hired. Fortunately, the very same day that we took him to RR Donnelley to complete an application, they asked him to schedule an interview. He was very excited. We coached him to sharpen his interview skills and practiced with him using mock interview sessions. Everything went very well, and Edwin got the job.

Now, Edwin is working for RR Donnelley, unpacking and processing shipments of books. He enjoys the work, and expressed tremendous gratitude for the support and assistance Telamon provided. We contacted the Recruitment Manager at RR Donnelley to follow-up on Edwin's placement, and see if there was anything further we could do. They asked us to come in and meet with them, to talk face-to-face about Edwin and his work. We were very pleased in the meeting when they told us that Edwin's performance was rated as Outstanding! The Recruitment Manager said they were glad they had hired him, and they really appreciated how Telamon did everything

possible to equip Edwin with skills, help him make the transition into a new job, maximize his performance, and stay in touch with regular follow-up.

Edwin told us he really likes working at RR Donnelley. He feels like his supervisor and co-workers are part of his family because they all work together as a team. He successfully completed the orientation and training period, and is now working full-time as a permanent employee, earning \$10.50 per hour with full health benefits. Edwin said he wanted to stay with this company and couldn't imagine going anywhere else for at least ten years! Most of all, Edwin is happy because the job allows him to support his family.



Marisela Ochoa

By Sara Lopez
Workforce Development
Specialist, Montross

Marisela Ochoa came to our office in Montross, Virginia in July of 2013. She was a seasonal farmworker at a local produce farm with no other work experience. After eligibility verification, testing, and assessment, Telamon Corporation was able to assist Marisela with overcoming her barriers. She was in need of job readiness and career exploration activities. After thinking long and hard about what she truly wanted to do, Marisela

decided that she wanted to become a paraprofessional and apply for positions as a teacher's assistant to be able to work with children. Marisela passed her test with high scores on the first try! She quickly got interviewed and hired at Rappahannock High School. Telamon provided Marisela with some financial assistance at the start of her new job. She is very appreciative of the help we were able to provide her. She continues to tell staff how much she loves her job. Marisela has been an 'A+' participant and we are very proud of her accomplishments!



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