

Telamon—Virginia

May 2014

Empowering Individuals, Improving Communities

Message from the State Director Sharon Saldarriaga

Looking back over the years, I came across a message I had written in our August 2004 newsletter. In it, I mentioned that we were continuing to hope for comprehensive immigration reform, which would include special provisions for farmworkers. How sad that in 2014, ten years later, we are still hoping for comprehensive immigration reform, including legislation that would benefit agricultural workers as well by providing an earned legalization program for the thousands of undocumented farmworkers in our nation who continue to perform the back-breaking labor that results in the abundance and diversity of food products that we so enjoy.

Passing comprehensive immigration reform would recognize the valuable work they perform and the indispensable contribution

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Persistence and Patience Pays Off

By Kathy Bullano
Workforce Development Specialist, Danville



When Donte Terry came to Telamon Corporation at the beginning of 2011, he entered the NFJP program with multiple barriers but a heart full of passion and the desire to succeed. The only work history that Mr. Terry had was in long-term agricultural work on a cattle farm in Nelson, VA. He continued to work on the cattle farm during his time in college and also during the time it took for him to obtain full time employment. Donte also was having transportation issues and was unsuccessful in finding employment on his own, but none of these barriers would stop Donte from finding a way to achieve his dreams.

Donte’s dream was to go to college to receive HVAC certification and then obtain a full-time career in the HVAC field but Mr. Terry had another barrier: none of the colleges in the area where Donte lived offered the HVAC curriculum and certification. But Donte wasn’t going to let that get in his way.

With the help of Telamon, Donte was enrolled into the HVAC program at Danville Community College

(DCC) and he willingly traveled the 110 miles that it took to get to DCC every day. Mr. Terry received needs related payments for travel due to his long journey back and forth to college and when necessary, tuition assistance.

He also received financial management training along with other training related supportive service needs. Once Donte graduated and obtained his certification in HVAC, he eagerly began on his new journey, which was seeking employment in the field of his dreams.

Little did he know it was going to take some time for him to obtain employment in the HVAC field, but Donte was determined that after all of his struggles, he was not going to give up hope. He stayed persistent and patient. Telamon began giving Donte individualized pre-employment and job readiness trainings, interview prep, as well as an outstanding resume. Donte attributes these as finally getting him noticed for his recent job interview.

On April 22, 2014, just 3 years after stepping through the doors of Telamon, Donte started his new career with the Maintenance Dept. at Mecklenburg County Public School Systems. He is going to obtain his journeyman’s license while employed and he is finally on his way

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Farmworker Takes Charge

By Sara Lopez
Workforce Development Specialist, Montross

Maria Izaguirre came to our office in Montross, VA last year seeking a better future. Her only work experience was as a seasonal farmworker - planting and picking vegetables, which she had done since high school. She attended many different workshops including pesticide safety training, CPR, financial literacy and job readiness. She spent some time doing career assessment and planning. Unexpectedly, Maria received an opportunity to become her own boss running a farm and she got straight to work. She had great mentors to work with her and staff could see how passionate Maria was becoming while planning and learning about her business. She had some struggles along the way, but overcame all obstacles with a little help from us. She took much time looking into ways to maximize the business's profits. Maria came into the program making a little over \$10,000 a year and now she is off to a great start and has her goal set at making a minimum \$25,000 profit her first year in business. Maria has been a marvelous participant and we are so proud that we could assist her along her path to great success.



Teamwork Yields Success

By Roberto Quintero
Pesticide and Workplace Safety Trainer

The Worker Protection Standard (WPS) is a regulation published in 1992 that is aimed at reducing the risk of pesticide poisoning and injury among agricultural workers and pesticide handlers. This year the Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs coordinated a long-sleeve shirt drive as part of its WPS Awareness Week.

When we first applied to participate in the drive I asked myself "How can I possibly do this alone?"

Instead I decided to ask my State Director if we could get the whole state involved. I proposed that we create a competition by having each office attempt to collect the most shirts. In this way, all five offices became active and everyone worked to promote WPS Awareness Week.

Each office was tasked to determine the most effective and creative way to collect shirts in their area. Some of the activities included: placing collection boxes in offices or community partner locations, distributing flyers, contacting churches and extension offices, and using word of mouth to alert friends and neighbors.



Our state goal was 100 shirts. We decided to increase our goal to 200 shirts. After a huge commitment and a team effort, Virginia Telamon collected 2941 shirts to be the number one state in the country. We have already begun to distribute shirts during pesticide safety trainings. I would especially like to congratulate the three offices that made the highest number of donations: Danville, Montross, and Harrisonburg.

In all cases, the common denominator was a passion to assist the farmworkers. We understood

the importance of pesticide safety and learned how long sleeve shirts help to protect the workers. Every worker wearing a long sleeve shirt is a safe worker.

We are very happy with the results and believe that many people both at Telamon and in the community have learned a lot about pesticide safety. One of the biggest takeaways for me was the notion that employees must be passionate about what they do in order to succeed. Also I learned that each office has its own culture that is conducive to team collaboration.

Local Farms

By Sara Lopez
Workforce Development Specialist, Montross

As many know, the National Farmworker Jobs Program helps farmworkers obtain the education and skills needed to secure employment leading to self-sufficiency, either inside or outside of agriculture. During the past few years here at our Telamon Montross location, there has been an increase of individuals seeking to start up their own business. The majority of these businesses are start-up farms. Local farms are important in this area.

Future generations would be safer and healthier if they were to have the opportunity to consume food that is grown without the help of chemicals, which can be done close to home. In many cases, the local produce you buy will have been just picked or harvested only hours before it arrives on the shelves/markets. Since fruits and vegetables start losing vitamins and other nutrients from the minute they are picked, that short travel time is important to their overall nutritional impact. They haven't had a chance to start losing nutrients, so they are actually healthier for you than they would be if they had to travel for a week or more to reach you. Locally grown fruits and vegetables generally end up in your hands at their peak of flavor because they were picked "in-season". The only way to get it any fresher is to grow it yourself! You will notice the difference in the just-picked, mouth-watering taste of the fruits and vegetables from local farms. You will

also find that smaller farms often have a diversification of foods and varieties, providing customers with unique heirloom varieties and other flavors.

Small farms are an integral part of the fabric of our communities, keeping the special character of the region alive. When you shop locally, far more of the money you spend stays local, supporting the businesses and individuals in your community. It creates a positive ripple effect that can be felt across the community. This enables the local businesses to grow and thrive, helping put more money back into the local community. Whenever possible, support your community by buying local foods. It's great for you and for them!

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to the life that he so diligently and patiently worked for.

Yesterday when I spoke with Donte, he said, "I want to thank you all for your help. I know it took a little longer than we expected but thank God I finally have my job!"

Telamon is now offering Donte an important part of job readiness training: "How to Keep a Job." When asked if he would be interested in this service, Donte replied, "I want to do anything to make me a better worker. I would love to take it."

We are so very proud of Donte Terry. It was a long journey for him but persistence and patience pays off. May his future be rewarding, challenging and fulfilling. Telamon helps so many people create better lives; we help empower them, giving them "Wings to Fly!"

Helping Those Who Need It Most

By Ana Nethken
Workforce Development Specialist, Harrisonburg



Justina came to Telamon after hearing about our farmworker program in an outreach presentation. We knew she was eager to begin training because she arrived one hour early for her appointment. She faced many of the challenges common to farmworkers, but she was motivated to improve her life. When we met her, Justina was 22 years old, raising two small children, and was unemployed. With great sadness, Justina told us about her first-born child who passed away from leukemia when he was five. During that horrible ordeal, Justina developed a passion to help others, especially children. What she needed was guidance and resources.

Telamon staff worked with Justina, step by step, to assess her abilities and develop a plan for training and employment. One of her primary goals was to enter employment as quickly as possible to alleviate her financial hardship. We were able to quickly put her into classroom training to become a Clinical Medical Assistant and then an internship.

Last week, we helped Justina get hired at Sentara Rockingham Memorial Hospital earning \$11.36 per hour plus benefits. She was extremely pleased and grateful for the assistance of our program. And now she has a chance to pursue a career helping the people who need it the most.

Homeownership in Danville

By Lynita Falls, Chatham

In 2000, Alfreda Stamps, a single mother working as a Certified Nursing Assistant, lived in public housing with her two children in Danville, VA. They had lived in public housing for three years. Although she was not sure how they would do it, they hoped one day to own their own home.

At that time, Telamon Corporation, the City of Danville, and the Danville Redevelopment and Housing Authority (DRHA) partnered to construct three single-family homes on Knollwood Drive in Danville, VA. The partnership hoped to sell the homes to eligible persons who were previously living in public housing. Alfreda embraced that opportunity to become a homeowner. She applied for the homeownership program and was found to be eligible.

In December of 2000, title to the newly constructed home was transferred to Alfreda. She and her children were very excited to move out of public housing and into their own home. Telamon provided Alfreda with a zero interest, fifteen-year private loan. She was scheduled to repay the home loan in fifteen years by making monthly payments to the Telamon office in Chatham, VA. She actually made the final payment in March, 2014, a year and eight months ahead of schedule!

Alfreda told us there is a sign in town that says “*Is There Homeownership in Danville?*” She said, “Every time I pass that sign, I smile, thinking: Yes, there is!”



Alfreda now holds a B.A. Degree in Psychology and is working toward her Masters in Organizational Management with a concentration in Public Administration.

Staff Notes

Telamon is sad to say goodbye to employee Robin Roark (Homeownership Project Manager) who resigned in April. We are very pleased to welcome back Tytiana Dennis who will be our new Certified Housing Counselor.

Concurrent with the staffing change, we decided to close the housing office in Chatham. Tytiana will be co-located with National Farmworker Jobs Program staff in our Danville office.

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State Director's Message

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they make to this nation's ability to have a safe, secure food supply. Providing a pathway to earned legalization for farmworkers and others who often work in jobs that many refuse to do is way overdue. Our legislators surely can come to a compromise that would take millions of workers out of the shadows without fear of deportation, increase the nation's security, provide a safe, affordable food supply, keep families together, provide opportunities for young immigrants in whom we've invested public education dollars, and finally, embrace our nation's history as a country that welcomes those who come here seeking a better life.

On a happier note, just as I was writing this message, announcement came in that on April 29, 2014, Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring declared that Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) have Virginia domicile, which makes them eligible for in-state tuition at Virginia's public colleges and universities. This decision is good for the thousands of young people who attend or who have graduated from Virginia schools by making higher education more affordable. This also is good for Virginia by increasing opportunities for young people to become more educated and successful.