

Telamon—Virginia

May 2015

Empowering Individuals, Improving Communities

Message from the State Director Sharon Saldarriaga

Each year in spring, thousands of farmworkers enter Virginia to begin the arduous task of planting and cultivating the hundreds of fruits and vegetables we enjoy. Their hours are long, their work is dangerous and difficult, and their living quarters often are cramped and in a deteriorated condition. Still they come. Many leave family behind while others bring their family with them. Their children often must miss valuable time in school as the families move to follow the crops. Sometimes the children work in the fields alongside their parents to augment the family income.

This is why we are so excited that the National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) has been reauthorized under the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity

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The Joy of Homeownership

By Tytiana Dennis
Housing Counselor, Danville

Telamon is pleased to announce the sale of three homes located on WI Powell Road in Dry Fork, Virginia. These sales represent years of hard work and collaboration between Telamon staff, our partners, and our clients. In particular, we thank Mayra Nickerson, Deputy State Director, and Tytiana Dennis, Housing Counselor, for their diligent efforts in helping three families succeed as home owners.

- Stephanie Callands is a single mother of three children. She has been a client in a Telamon lease-purchase program for several years. She is a teacher's aide in a Virginia middle school, and has been working with Telamon to improve her credit score and reduce her debts. When she became qualified, Telamon aided her in the process of purchasing her home in March.

- Noel Moreno is a single father of two children originally from New York who relocated to



Stephanie Callands, Tytiana Dennis, Mayra Nickerson

Virginia. After years in a Telamon lease-purchase program and with the aid of housing counseling, he managed to increase his credit score, save money, and finally purchase his home to provide a better life for his children.

- Christopher and Danielle Riddle are a young couple with four small children. After a failed business venture, Christopher was able to secure a new position, and by working with Telamon was able to increase his credit score, save money, and purchase a home for his family.

Mohammed's Success

By Lorena McQueen
Workforce Development
Specialist, Harrisonburg



Mohammed had been working seasonally cutting herbs. He hoped for a chance to improve his economic situation and enrolled for services at Telamon. We determined he was eligible for our farmworker program and began the process of assessment. Mohamed's greatest barrier to employment was his skill level in English. His primary goal was to qualify for better employment as quickly as possible to alleviate ongoing financial hardship.

Telamon worked with Mohammed to develop an employment plan. He entered the Intensive English Program at Eastern Mennonite University and Telamon provided assistance with tuition, books, supplies, gas, rent, and nutrition. In addition, Telamon provided job readiness training and interview preparation, and helped Mohammed build his resume.

When Mohammed completed his training, we helped him with his job applications until he was hired as a loader at the Wal-Mart Distribution Center. He is now working full-time, earning \$19.40 per hour plus full medical benefits. Mohammed was extremely pleased and grateful for the assistance provided by Telamon. His new job provides a stable income and his new communication skills make it easier to thrive in the Harrisonburg community.

Career Change

By Nelson Diaz
Program Coordinator

Did you enter the wrong career due to bad advice? Does your current career lack room for growth? Are you burned out from a high-stress career? Are you bored in an unchallenging career? If you answered *yes*, then maybe it's time for a change; but changing careers is difficult and can be overwhelming. You will need a solid plan and firm commitment. Be certain that you want a new career, rather than just needing a different employer. Once you determine that you're ready to change, consider these factors:

Career Choice

First you will need to identify your likes and dislikes. Consider taking a self-directed career assessment at www.onetcenter.org or www.careeronestop.org. These assessments will identify your work-related interests, values, and abilities; match your job skills with occupational requirements in the local labor market; and inform you about industry projections and high-demand fields.

Portable Skills

Many job skills translate perfectly across multiple careers. Portable skills (such as collaboration, communication, and decision making) give you leverage for success in a new career.

Training and Education

If a particular career suits your interests or offers significant financial advantages, it may be worthwhile to pursue it even if it requires additional education. Or, you may need additional training to improve and expand your skill sets in order to compete in the job market. Visit www.careeronestop.org for information on training, financial aid, and career ladders.

Obstacles

Change can be scary and you may get discouraged before reaching your goals. If you find your commitment is wavering, remind yourself of why you began this journey toward change. Embrace any false starts, keep moving forward, and look at obstacles as opportunities for bold action.

Support

Identify the people in your life who truly believe in you and want you to succeed. These people form your support network and can include friends, family, and mentors. They can guide you through the rough patches, keep you motivated, and help you stay focused.

You can always talk to a member of Telamon staff if you need workforce development advice. They can help you navigate, answer questions, or give advice. The journey is yours, but sometimes speaking to a professional can guide you where you want to go.

Life Experiences *Will* Change Us

By Douglas Kendall Adams
Workforce Development
Specialist, Danville

On a sunny Thursday back in August of 2010, Benjamin Tucker stepped through the doors of the Danville Telamon Corporation office with one thing in mind: to become a Mechanical Engineer.

Benjamin had just recently graduated from Gretna High School where he was an Honor Graduate and received an Advanced Diploma. He had worked hard throughout his years in high school. In addition to the hours he was in school each day, Benjamin spent his time studying, doing homework, performing missionary work for his church, and working on a cattle farm where he fed, tagged, and administered shots to cattle. Benjamin did not depend on others for help and did everything he could to better himself.

After Benjamin's first few visits to our office, he enrolled at Danville Community College (DCC). He excelled in their Mechanical Engineering program, but Benjamin still had a major challenge to overcome. He could live at home in Gretna and continue working on the cattle farm to earn money toward his expenses, but the income would not be enough to cover everything, especially considering the price



of gas and the 71 mile round-trip commute. Telamon was able to assist Benjamin with this problem by providing needs-related payments to cover his mileage. These payments allowed Benjamin to pay for gas, live at home, continue working, and have reliable transportation to and from school. This was a lifesaver for him. With this problem solved, Benjamin was under less stress and was able to focus his attention on school.

In July of 2012, Benjamin Tucker graduated from DCC with his degree in Mechanical Engineering. Before he started his new career, he was given the opportunity to do some missionary work for his church in Africa. During his missionary work, Benjamin realized that his service to others was a way of balancing the scales. Telamon had helped Benjamin, and there was no need to pay it back,

but he was able to pay it forward by helping others in turn. His service work in Africa was a profound experience leading to this epiphany that changed his life. Benjamin realized, "In helping others, we shall help ourselves."

When he returned to the United States, Benjamin dedicated his life to helping others as a personal goal and as a career. He chose to become a Registered Nurse (RN) and spend his life helping to save lives. In May 2015, Benjamin will graduate from DCC with his degree as an RN and soon after will be starting his new career at one of the most prestigious hospitals in South Side Virginia, Lynchburg General Hospital, in the Progressive Cardiac Unit.

We are so proud of Benjamin for all that he has done with his life and we wish him nothing but the very best in his future endeavors.

Lucky are those who shall be helped by Benjamin.

**Hat's off to you,
Benjamin Tucker!**



Araceli Johnson

By Sara Lopez
Workforce Development
Specialist, Montross

One day Araceli Johnson walked through our door; little did she know she was signing up for a better life. Araceli was passing by and she saw an “employment and training” sign and decided to stop in and see what jobs were available.

Araceli had worked for fifteen years in manufacturing, when one day, they just closed the doors and she was left unemployed. This was the only work experience she had. She didn’t know what to do, but she had a house payment and three children to support on her own and couldn’t be without work. Soon after being laid off, she found a job at a local farm and began picking and planting fruits and vegetables.

Once she was given an orientation to the National Farmworker Jobs Program and realized that she qualified for the program, she was truly amazed at all we could help her accomplish. Araceli wanted to get started immediately. She began attending English as a Second Language classes to increase her ability to write and read the language. Once her level was high enough, she transitioned into General Education Diploma classes and started attending those four days a week. She went on to earn her diploma and participated in the graduation ceremony at Rappahannock Community College.

We provided Araceli with a Work Experience opportunity here at the Telamon Corporation office in Montross. We saw firsthand how responsible and determined Araceli was. Araceli attended all the workshops we offered until she was officially job ready. Telamon assisted her with purchasing interview clothing and she was ready to start searching.

Araceli was hired as a Product Service Associate at Lowes two weeks ago and is extremely happy. She is working 40 hours a week and making over \$13.00 dollars an hour. Araceli has been through many struggles and challenges, but manages to maintain a positive attitude no matter the circumstances. She always tells staff, “Problems are opportunities in disguise.” She thanks Telamon and staff tremendously for helping her to reach her goals. We are so excited to see her succeed and be part of her success. Congratulations, Araceli!



State Director’s Message

(Continued from page 1)

Act. This allows us to continue the education, skill training, employment, and support services to migrant and seasonal farmworkers. While we cannot change significantly the conditions farmworkers toil under, we can provide them and their dependents with the tools for a better future, either inside or outside of agriculture. We want to thank Congress for preserving this important program and also express our gratitude to others who aid in our efforts to provide farmworker families with a better life. We are able to provide cultural enrichment activities to farmworker youth through a grant from The Theodore H. Barth Foundation, Inc. Farmworkers receive Pesticide and Workplace Safety training through funding provided primarily by the Virginia Department of Agricultural and Consumer Services as well as the NFJP and the Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs. NCALL, Inc. provides funding to assist farmworkers with housing and utility expenses. All of these partners enable us to improve the well-being of farmworkers and put them on a path to self-sufficiency.

