

Telamon—Virginia

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Empowering Individuals, Improving Communities

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Message from the State Director - Sharon L. Saldarriaga

As we begin 2009, our country is facing an economic crisis that is likely to get worse before it gets better. People are losing jobs at an increasing rate and Virginia's overall unemployment rate at 5.2% is the highest rate recorded in Virginia since a high of 5.3% in 1996, with some areas now reaching close to 14%. Although people with education and good skills are losing their jobs, nowhere is the impact of the economic downturn more serious than for those who lack either or both of these things. Investment in workforce development is critical in helping prepare our population for jobs paying decent wages so that once the economy begins to turn around, these workers can benefit. Although our National Farmworker Jobs Program was not included in the stimulus package, we are pleased to see that the current administration has taken other steps to invest in human capital and that it is realistic about the challenges, involved and what it takes for preparing a 21st century workforce. Telamon staff are equally committed to seeing that our customers, both farmworkers and others with limited English and occupational and educational challenges continue to have opportunities for access to good jobs with benefits, home ownership, and a better quality of life for themselves and their families.

March promises to be a busy month as employment and training staff head to Washington, D.C. for training and meetings with our legislators to discuss the impact of our programs in the Commonwealth. With a number of our customers soon to complete training, staff will be working hard to help them identify and obtain good jobs with benefits. §

The Wal-Mart Foundation awards Telamon Corporation \$50,000 to continue *iConexiones!* services in the Richmond Metro Area

Telamon Corporation received a grant for \$50,000 from the Wal-Mart Foundation. This award enables the organization to resume its services to limited English proficient speakers in the Richmond metro area by helping them acquire the necessary tools and information to obtain new or better employment and to renew its partnership with the Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (VAHCC).

"This grant will serve critical needs throughout the metro area to provide this population with increased access to workforce development services, offered out of the VAHCC bilingual resource and business center," said Michel Zajur, Founder/CEO of the Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. The program, *iConexiones!* (Connections) is a training and resource program to assist this population to obtain jobs. Services range from developing free resumes to assisting with ESL and GED information and workshops. This program is designed to provide people with access to workforce development activities and information that they would not receive due to language and cultural barriers.

Originally, the program was funded with discretionary funding from the Governor's Office of Workforce Development. However, because of budget constraints, Telamon was forced to seek other funding. With assistance from BB&T for Workplace Literacy Skills workshops and The Cameron Foundation, we were able to continue the program for residents in the Tri-Cities area. Now, with the generous contribution from the Wal-Mart Foundation, we are able to resume services for Richmond area residents. "Wal-Mart is pleased to help Telamon re-start its critical job training and preparation services in the Richmond area," said Jeff Kraus, market manager for the retailer. "Telamon offers a hand up, preparing our neighbors for employment. And there is no better way to contribute to economy growth and personal development than to help someone find a job."

The services are available every Monday and Tuesday at the Virginia Employment Commission in Hopewell and every Wednesday through Friday at the Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in the Bank of America Building at 10700 Midlothian Turnpike, Suite 200 in Richmond. Appointments may be made by calling Nellie Vega Cruz at 804-754-6508.



Are you eligible for earned income?

By Lynita Falls Housing Counselor, Gretna

The Best Coalition of Danville-Pittsylvania County and Caswell County is providing free tax services to income eligible individuals/families. Telamon Corporation in Gretna is a host site to offer FREE Tax Preparation. This program focuses on helping taxpayers who are eligible for earned income to get their maximum refund. The service is free, thus allowing households to retain the \$300 to \$500 a person typically pays to have his/her taxes prepared/e-filed by a paid preparer. Each year, millions of Americans are eligible for earned income credits, but don't realize they qualify for



it or they don't know how to claim it.

Volunteers are VITA/TCE certified and will work various hours and sites throughout the City of Danville, Pittsylvania and Caswell Counties. Volunteers will prepare and electronically file taxes for households with incomes up to \$40,000 a year (depending on family size). As part of the free service, taxpayers will be asked to complete a client survey. The surveys will be used to refer income eligible households to other free or discounted services that are available.

The Department of Housing and Community Development is sponsoring a "Matched Savings Weekend," February 20 and 21, 2009. During the Savings Weekend, VIDA Intermediaries (Telamon in Gretna) will team up with the Free Tax Preparation Centers to promote "SAVINGS." Telamon staff will be available to enroll potential savers in the VIDA program to start saving for purchasing a home, starting a business, or furthering their education. For more information, call 434-856-8357.§

Telamon Corporation Partners with Local WIB Providers to Assist Local Youth Needs.

By Maria Roe Regional Manager, Warsaw

As resources continue to shrink for regular Americans due to the recent economy slump and jobs become harder to come by, many young adults in our area find it more and more difficult to gain employment. Among those affected are those working or supported by agricultural seasonal jobs and young people whose parents must deal with cultural and language barriers and therefore, have few resources to help them. Laborer positions, although out there, seem to be receiving more and more applicants as the days go by; that makes it even tougher for young people without training and without real work experience. However, as we saw advertised on the Virginia Employment Commission list of jobs recently, there is demand in the Northern Neck area for some positions. There were several positions opened in the medical field not only in Warsaw, but also in other nearby locations. Among those were LPNs, CNAs, culinary jobs, and engineering positions, etc., employment areas that Telamon staff have been advising customers interested in those fields to train for.

Telamon already has successfully supported training and job placement for various CNA positions in

conjunction with other partners such as the local Virginia Employment Commission office and the Rappahannock Community College (RCC).

The current RCC's newsletter featured several of our customers that are in training this semester to become LPNs. Christina Alvarez, Lupita Ocegüera, and Vanessa Ramirez were on their front page. These students are already into their second semester and showing great enthusiasm and professionalism as Richard Leeper, Christina Alvarez's Psychology and Sociology Instructor, said to our local representative, "This is the second class that Christina has had with me. She is a front row student. She always sits at the front, which reflects that she is always attentive and focused. While generally a quiet, student, she answers questions and in doing so is almost always dead on with her answer. Her class work is always well done, and her attendance is virtually guaranteed. Testing wise she does well, making an "A" in the fall, and well on her way to another "A" in what many consider a tough class. I have had little contact outside of the classroom, but she is always very polite and seems to interact well with other students." "As you can tell, 'always' is an easy term with her. She is a very talented and conscientious student," he added.

"Christina participates in class, is on time, completes assignments and is an overall good student," said RCC's Nursing Instructor, Karen Taliaferro.

Story continues on page 4.....

The Virginia Farmworkers Legal Assistance Project

**By Christianne Queiroz
Managing Attorney**

The Virginia Farmworkers Legal Assistance Project (VFLAP) provides legal assistance and education to farmworkers in Virginia. The Project's staff and volunteers reach out to farmworkers who migrate to Virginia to harvest crops. Migrant farmworkers are a vulnerable class of workers who face significant barriers receiving services, including cultural and geographic isolation and language barriers. VFLAP helps farmworkers overcome these obstacles to access their legal rights.

The Project's outreach workers travel statewide to visit farmworkers for one-on-one discussions, educating farmworkers about their rights. Typical topics include wage and hour issues, paycheck deductions, housing conditions, workers' compensation, and health and safety issues. Through outreach, the Project's staff explains the role of legal aid and other social services organizations that offer services to migrant workers.

Through strategic planning and partnering with service providers and volunteers, our staff of three was

able to visit 166 camps and meet with 3,811 farmworkers in 2008.

The migrant farmworkers in Virginia come from diverse countries such as Mexico, Jamaica and Haiti. Outreach efforts are yielding extended representation in cases involving housing and work conditions, unpaid wages and H2A contract issues. In 2008, VFLAP has celebrated its 30th year of service to migrant farmworkers in Virginia. Central Virginia Legal Aid Society is currently updating its webpage and information about the Virginia Farmworkers Legal Assistance Project. CVLAS website is:

www.cvlas.org

Farmworkers can reach Christianne by dialing:

1-888-200-8479 from the US,

001.800.217.5173 from Mexico.

or by visiting the office at:

1000 Preston Ave
Suite B
Charlottesville, VA
22903



Christianne Queiroz, Managing Attorney for the Virginia Legal Assistance Project, is a multilingual/bi-national lawyer who was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In Brazil, Christianne taught law and participated in a pioneer partnership as a Human Rights Instructor to military policemen with Amnesty International. In 2002, Christianne graduated with a Master of Laws at UVA Law School. Christianne lives in Charlottesville and currently manages the Virginia Farmworkers Legal Assistance Project with Central Virginia Legal Aid Society. Her passions include fighting for justice and respect of human rights, animals and environmental protection, and acting.

Story from page 4... Telamon partners with local

Many students work part time to help support their expenses, but in some programs, they are discouraged by their program directors from working during their training in order to dedicate their full attention to their curriculum. Some students receive grants and many have supportive parents and relatives to help them ease the load. In many homes however, this is not at all possible due to their low income allowance. These are some of the customers Telamon is able to assist through the program.



Telamon students from left to right: Christina Alvarez, Vanessa Ramirez-Olmos and Lupita Ocegüera. Picture courtesy of Maria Roe. 2009

“Telamon has really supported me to be able to achieve my educational goals,” said Christina Alvarez, adding, “I don’t have the stress of having to get a job while being a full time student.” Although Telamon can’t provide all financial support to a student, the customers receive emergency assistance, counseling services and other when necessary.

The students are expected to maintain an educational standard and values and to obtain a job at the end of their educational careers.

“These are excellent students. It is evident in their GPA - all of them have a 3.5 GPA or better except for those who began working on their degree this semester. They are obviously very bright, well organized and well prepared for their classes and are doing an outstanding job as students,” said Rappahannock Community College Counselor,

Marie Marsden. “We, here at RCC, are very happy to say that they are RCC students.” RCC continues to support Telamon staff efforts and those of the students, as a local community college, and as a WIB partner.

As Virginia’s recession worsens, thousands more children will be pushed into poverty, according to the Commonwealth Institute.

There are signs of mounting harm to Virginia families and children. An alarming new report from that institution is warning that Virginia's poverty level could increase by as much as 218,000 people if national unemployment levels reach 9 percent. The Federal Reserve is predicting unemployment rates in the nation could hit 9 percent as early as this week.

Much talk is heard today about programs designed to assist low income individuals, but, if we can promote training leading to jobs that lead to self-sufficiency and facilitate opportunities for trained youth to remain in our area, we also will be promoting a higher standard for those who live and will retire here. There are many young people, as well as adults, in our area eager to succeed and they are entitled to better opportunities. As one of the Workforce Investment Board partners, Telamon Corporation in its’ Warsaw office continues to work to alleviate low-income customer needs in the area. For more information, you may contact our local office in the VEC by calling Maria Roe at (804) 313-5018.§

