

Telamon—Virginia

August 2008

Empowering Individuals, Improving Communities

Volume 10, Edition 3

Message from the State Director
Sharon L. Saldarriaga

Telamon Corporation offers National Farmworker
Jobs Program services in South Hill office

Funding for the National Farmworker Jobs Program was secured in July and staff are gearing up for a new year in which we will continue to provide opportunities for farmworkers to begin on career pathways leading to increased self-sufficiency.

We recently joined one of our Greta housing counseling clients who was chosen as Rural Development's "Homeowner of the Year" in a celebration for National Homeownership Month. (*See story on pg. 3*)

Our *¡Conexiones!* Project, making workforce development services accessible to limited English proficient customers has served over 1050 jobseekers since June 2007. The program continues to provide a much needed enhancement to the current workforce system in Virginia.

On a sad note, I am sorry to report that one of my Deputy State Directors, Cecily Rodriguez, is leaving us after nine years to take a position with the Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse. She has displayed outstanding leadership and worked hard to expand Telamon Corporation's services and programs in Virginia. She will be greatly missed but we wish her well in her new position. §

By Cecily Rodriguez
Richmond

Telamon Corporation has begun offering National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) services in its South Hill office located at 120 W. Danville Street.

The NFJP is a nationally directed program of job training and employment assistance for migrant and seasonal farmworkers. It is authorized by Congress in the Workforce Investment Act Section 167 to counter the impact of chronic unemployment and underemployment experienced by migrant and seasonal farmworkers who primarily depend on jobs in agricultural labor. Since its inception with the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, the program has been an integral part of the national workforce strategy. The NFJP assists migrant and seasonal farmworkers (MSFWs) and their families attain greater economic stability. The program assists farmworkers to acquire new job skills in occupations that offer higher wages and a more stable employment outlook. In addition to skills training, the program provides support services that help farmworkers remain and stabilize their employment in agriculture. The NFJP also facilitates coordination of services through the One-Stop system for MSFWs so that they may access other services of the workforce system. With assistance from the Office of Pesticide Services, Telamon also provides a Pesticide and Workplace Safety program that presents Worker Protection Standard training to farmworkers in this office and throughout Virginia.

Farmworkers and their dependents are eligible for services if they have legal permission to work in the United States and have worked in the field or a warehouse where they handled an agricultural product during the last 24 months. They must have earned at least \$800 or have worked at least 25 days in farmwork within 12 consecutive months within a 24 month period. In addition, either 50% of the work time or 50% of the earned income must

have been in farmwork. The farmwork must be seasonal in nature. The total family income must not exceed the federal farmworker income guidelines.

Telamon Corporation began providing services to farmworkers in Virginia in 1975. Since then, we have expanded our base of employment and training services to include a wide array of housing, nutrition, and other initiatives targeted to the needs identified in the communities we serve. This has enabled us to extend our services to a variety of other populations. Programs are operated out of eight field offices and are coordinated by the state office in Richmond.

The Telamon office in South Hill offers a number of housing services to the community as well. The Weatherization program provides for home repairs, which are made to bring homes up to thermal standards, such as sealing large openings, installing insulation, and repairing or replacing heating equipment. To meet the eligibility criteria, applicants' incomes are multiplied by 130 percent, and if this is below the poverty guidelines for their areas, the applicants are eligible. The Emergency Home Repair program provides funds for necessary installation of new roofs and siding on the homes that are weatherized. This activity is carried out in conjunction with the Weatherization program, so the recipients must be enrolled in that program prior to applying for the emergency home repair funds. In order to qualify for this phase of weatherization, the applicant must have an income no more than 60 percent of the median income for the area. The Indoor Plumbing/Rehabilitation program provides installation of new bathrooms and general housing rehabilitation where needed. Applicants must have an income no more than 60 percent of the median income for the area. §

Farmworker Youth and the Arts Community find Mutual Benefit on the Eastern Shore

By Soraya Buckner
Regional Manger
Exmore

I have been working with the Farmworker Youth Program for almost three years. Every year, more and more possibilities open to the children of farmworkers on the shore: field trips, tutoring, and books are activities that we have provided to the children in the past.

Recently, as part of their activities, the children spent a morning at the Children's Museum, went to Tangier Island to have a fun day on the beach, and went to the nature park at Kiptopeake and Assateague to walk in the woods to learn about the forest. Tutoring classes helped children with homework and reading so they can improve at school. They have gone to the World Healing Institute and discover a world previously unknown to them.

All those activities are not possible without funding from the Theodore H. Barth Foundation, Inc. The fact is that most farmworkers' incomes are not sufficient to pay membership dues and buy meals for those types of activities.

This year, other opportunities for these youth are opening up. Since becoming a member of the Eastern Shore's Own (ESO) Art Center, I have discovered ways that our farmworker children can participate in the Center's classes and activities. I began to enroll the children in programs at the Center.

My first fear was the lack of transportation the children had to get to the center. But I was pleasantly surprised at how the parents were making the effort to bring their children to the Center.

They saw the opportunity as beneficial and made it a priority to get their children there. For the first time in the



history of the ESO, we have more diversity. The ballet teachers are just in love with one of our farmworker youth, Karla. The pottery instructor is very happy with the pottery expres-

sion of her three new students. Thanks to the Farmworker Youth Program, we have been able to enroll children in ballet classes, pottery classes, guitar lessons and karate classes.

This summer, ten farmworker youth will be enrolled in the ESO Arts Summer Camp and five farmworker youth will be enrolled at the Arts Enter in Cape Charles. The second center is located in Northampton County, so it will be accessible to the farmworker youth living in that area. ESO offers classes to Accomack County residents but since gasoline prices are so high, they appreciate a location closer to home. The beauty of this program is to see these children,



who have never even thought of being involved in activities like these, now become a real part of the community. Instead of being the hidden children that come and go during the agricultural season, they are learning new things and helping to enhance the fabric of the community by bringing diversity to local arts initiatives. Thanks to the Farmworker Youth Program, both the youth and the centers are enjoying a deeper connection to the arts. §

The National Farmworker Jobs Program helps meet the needs of the health care industry

By Maria Roe
Regional Manager
Warsaw

Note from the Writer: The name of the customer has been changed at her request to avoid conflict.

While finding jobs is becoming increasingly difficult for most Americans, and largely for low income people without specific professions, medical careers seem to be in consistent demand throughout. Some professions such as Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) require relatively short training and offer great employment prospects.

In rural areas, particularly in the Northern Neck, young people look to expand their horizons upon completion of high school. Seeking either college, military careers, or simply to move to more populated areas with broader job opportunities, they leave behind the older folks to fend for themselves in the eve of their lives.

"Virginia, like the nation as a whole, is faced with a shortage of health care professionals," said Secretary of Health and Human Resources Marilyn Tavenner, according to Governor Timothy M. Kaine in a Press Release on July 2, 2008. "As the population ages, the need for nursing support and personal care services grows, and a well-trained workforce is paramount to providing the long-term care Virginians need now and in the future."

Guadalupe Rodriguez is one of such professionals. At the age of 17, she was a single

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Welcome Aboard!

Colleen Killeen started in our Exmore office in May. Her experience as an Office Assistant for several years has been a great addition to our office. She learned Spanish in Spain where she lived for five years. As an immigrant in Spain, she has the capacity to understand our population better. Being an immigrant is not easy and she knows it. She is married and has two grown children and one grandson. She lived on the Shore thirty years ago and has just returned recently. We are sure glad she did!



Telamon holds “Preparate Para La Chamba”
Workshop at VAHCC

By Alexandra Runyon
Conexiones Counselor
Richmond

Workshops like the “Preparate para la Chamba” workshop, held at Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce on Saturday June 21st, are part of a variety of services offered by Conexiones-Employment and Technology Center. This program, directed by staff at Telamon Corporation, had 19 attendees. The majority of them are currently looking for jobs. Others were just looking for better skills before entering the workforce. In this workshop, we talked about work ethics, employers’ expectations, tips for job interviews, and many other aspects of the workforce.

Alex Gallimore, who is the Human Resource Manager at Food Lion Distribution Center in Disputanta, came in and spoke to the participants. He talked about his company and the benefits that they offer their employees. Our guest also gave advice on how to be a good employee and what employers are looking for. We were happy to have invited him because his experience was valuable to the participants in the workshop.

The participants got a lot of useful information from the workshop. “I think this work team is excellent because they help you to see the future clearly. Thank you”

said George Portillo.

Odessa Salamanca said “I think this was a good program because it helped us to better ourselves by addressing work ethics. It also provides us with useful information for when we are on the job”.



An excited Brenda Rodriguez said “It has been an exciting experience. I have learned a lot. This

workshop has given me the energy and the courage I need right now to change my life and feel proud of myself. Thank you very much for this opportunity. Of course I will share this experience with someone else, so he or she can take advantage of this helpful workshop.”

Telamon Corporation provided a delicious lunch and educational materials for all participants to take home. They all had a good time and learned very useful information. It was very successful and very educational for all who attended.



We are very excited about the positive feedback that we received following the workshop. Our goal is to empower individuals and improve communities. Telamon plans to have many more workshops like this in the future. §

A GREAT DAY FOR
A CELEBRATION

By Tiana Clark Dennis
Secretary
Gretna

Unlike the cold weather we experienced in February, Monday June 30, 2008 was a beautiful day for a celebration. USDA Rural Development, in partnership with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and Telamon Corporation, recently held an event to celebrate National Homeownership Month at Telamon’s Beverly Heights Subdivision project in Pittsylvania County. Congressman Virgil Goode was on hand to congratulate the new homeowner, Cindy Martin, and all the organizations involved. His remarks stressed that the purchase of this home was through a low-interest rate mortgage offered by USDA Rural Development and not through a grant. Ceremonial checks representing USDA Rural Development’s contributions to the 5th district and to the state of Virginia were presented to Congressman Goode (\$48 million) and to Senator Jim Webb’s office (\$195 million).

Ms. Martin was chosen as homeowner of the year. She participated in biweekly homebuyer classes in Telamon’s Danville office

and also participated in the Virginia Individual Development Account (VIDA) program. This home was made possible with an Affordable Housing Preservation and Production grant funded by DHCD and mortgage financing by USDA Rural Development along with Telamon’s allocation of home funds. Construction was done by Poteat Construction, Inc of Danville.

Telamon’s Homeownership Project Manager, Robin Roark, congratulated Cindy on her great accomplishment of becoming a first time homebuyer and on her drive and determination to see her dream come true. She added that the Gretna office has a motto- “*Making dreams come true one house at a time.*” §



The Honorable Virgil Goode with Robin Roark and Sharon Saldarriaga of Telamon Corporation.

Former Farmworker Family Opens Small Business

By Sharleen Drummond
Case Manager
Exmore

For about eight months, Telamon Corporation in Exmore, helped Valentin Cuevas and his wife Carolina to achieve



Niall Finnegan, Carolina Cuevas, her son, Ivan Deanda, and Sharleen Drummond

their life long goal of opening a small business. This new business will go a long way in improving their quality of life. The process involved hundreds of hours of work and great attention to detail. However, it has been worth the effort.

La Hacienda is located at 9052 Occohannock Neck Road in Exmore. It opened for business on April 22. Their store, which sells Latin American food and merchandise, will also sell take-out Mexican food. The store will be providing a variety of merchandise and services to the community. Services available for the community include: a daily take out menu, phone cards, check cashing, etc.

Telamon partnered with Niall Finnegan at the Small Business Development Center to create a business plan and a timeline for opening. In addition, Telamon attended appointments with Valentin to aid in understanding the process with lawyers, insurance agents and town officials. We also helped him troubleshoot as problems cropped up. We will continue to follow their progress in order to assist them in having a successful business. §

Health Care Industry, continued from page 2

mother faced with having to provide for herself and her young son when her mother had to relocate with Guadalupe's siblings. Guadalupe had been able to secure living facilities for herself and her son with relatives, and whenever possible, some help from her boyfriend. Yet she found herself working in the fields, fearful of the upcoming ending of the agricultural season that threatened to leave her without work and without money. Since she didn't have a driver's license or a car, she also was dependent upon others for transportation,

She went to the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) in search of a job or training that would enable her to obtain one. While there, she spoke with me. I requested information on her behalf and discovered from the High School Guadalupe had attended that she had been a great student. "She is a bright student that graduated early because she had earned enough credits prior to her 18th birthday to be able to graduate at 17," said the Principal. "It is a shame that Guadalupe doesn't continue a further education" said one of her teachers, who added that she could easily have attended college and successfully graduated if not for the financial barriers.

Telamon worked with Guadalupe to assist her in obtaining a driver's license, to search career and job options, and to pay for day care and other necessities once she chose to enter CNA training. After 3 months of training, Guadalupe obtained CNA certification and then successfully passed the Board Exam. She was immediately hired by Warsaw Health Center, a local retirement home where she is currently working. "Guadalupe is an excellent worker; we are glad she came to work for us," said her manager. We could use another 10 people like her," she said.

Upon the first few months of working there, she obtained medical benefits and a raise in salary. Although she started working the night shift, she is now working days. Do you ever think about going back to work in the fields I asked her. "No," she said. "I don't mind working in the fields, but people here are so sweet and nice to me! Besides, I never have to worry about it raining or being too hard and not able to work or earn money. I have the security of knowing that I will have work tomorrow."

I also asked her if she ever tired of working with just elderly people. "Don't

you wish you had become a LPN (Licensed Practical Nurse) or a RN (Registered Nurse) so you could earn more money?" She said that the extra money would be nice, but with it she would have the responsibility of having to administer medication and being responsible for people's lives. "I can always do that a little later," she said. "For now I am happy where I am; I will take classes and continue my education one day."

"You can't be in this profession only for the money. You won't be happy or fulfilled working like that," said the Activity Director at the Warsaw Center. She went on to say, "I really care about my patients and they become almost a part of your own family." She also said that some of the patients only have them and rarely receive visits from relatives.

I asked Guadalupe if she thought her mother would like to have the opportunity that she had. "I don't know, after so many years of working in the fields, she has adapted to that kind of work. It would be hard for her to do something else now," she said.

A CNA can earn from \$8 to \$12 or \$14 per hour, depending on the location and job. Some choose to work in hospitals or other types of facilities instead of nursing homes. The training required is 3 months. A LPN can earn \$20 and more per hour, depending on the location and institution. The required training is about 2 years. An RN can earn \$39 and more per hour and the training requires 4 years of post secondary education.

"Virginia leads the nation in helping people transition away from public assistance and into the workforce because of our innovative programs and the dedication of our staff," Governor Kaine said. "We're training TANF recipients for jobs in fields with growing workforce needs, helping secure job placement and retention, while meeting a crucial need in the Commonwealth's health care system."

Telamon can help train and place migrant and seasonal farmworkers into year round work with benefits and/or provide emergency assistance when needed to workers that meet the eligibility guidelines.

Update: Shortly after this article was written, Guadalupe came into the office to get information on becoming a LPN. §