

# Telamon—Virginia

February 2014

*Empowering Individuals, Improving Communities*

## Message from the State Director Sharon Saldarriaga

Welcome to 2014! Despite the snow and frigid temperatures, there is much to celebrate. Virginia's economy continues to remain strong and open for business. Consistently rated as one of the best states for business and with our unemployment rate significantly lower than the national average, Virginia is positioned to remain economically viable. I am pleased to report that our National Farmworker Jobs Program is doing very well. We have exceeded our new enrollment and placement goals for the quarter that ended in December. Our Workforce Development Specialists continue to diligently assist farmworkers with training and securing employment. Housing staff working with our energy conservation programs attended the Weatherization Assistance Program Interchange in January where information was given on the Quality Work Plan, administrative monitoring and a revised

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## Opening Doors

By Sara Lopez  
Workforce Development Specialist, Montross

A young gentleman named Alejandro Diaz walked through the doors at Telamon Corporation one day. He was out of work and had a family of six to support. As a person coming from a big family of farmworkers, he stated that his parents encouraged him to become a farmworker as well. He wasn't involved in any extracurricular activities in school and he didn't do as well as he had hoped.

Right out of high school, Alejandro started working in farmwork. Everything seemed fine until the work started ending more and more quickly than in previous years. At that point, even though his extended family and friends tried to help him out, it just wasn't enough. He realized that in order to continue providing his family the support that they needed, he needed to make some changes.

At first Alejandro didn't know where to start, because he had only worked in farmwork except for a short time he worked in construction years earlier. He stated that he did enjoy that work for that small period of time.

After completing assessments and doing career exploration, Ale-



jandro decided that he wanted to make the change and begin working in construction. Alejandro expressed much excitement about his decision and we started going through job readiness. Alejandro quickly got the opportunity for an interview and was hired the same week!

He is now working at AirTek making \$22.50 an hour! Alejandro couldn't believe what was happening! He expressed much gratitude and said that by walking through the doors at Telamon, many more doors were opened to incredible opportunities.

Alejandro showed commitment to excellence in all areas of his life. He overcame his fears and stepped beyond his self-doubts. Even with all the challenges that life threw his way, Alejandro was living his dream! He now enjoys a successful career and a better future for his family. Congratulations, Alejandro!

## Victory

By Sara Lopez  
Workforce Development Specialist, Montross

Victor stepped into our office last year and was found eligible for the National Farmworker Jobs Program. His family's main source of income was from farmwork and he was about to get laid off. This made him truly worried because he needed to continue getting income in order to support his wife and two small children. We immediately began testing and conducting career assessments. Victor decided he wanted to be a welder. We assisted him until he was officially job ready. He faithfully attended all scheduled sessions and even interviewed with his employer of choice. He was quickly offered a welding position and accepted right away. With our assistance, Victor was able to purchase all of the equipment and supplies needed for his new job. We were also able to provide him with gas assistance until he received his first paycheck. Victor's starting wage is \$9.85 per hour. Whenever I follow up with Victor and ask how his job is going, he always speaks about how much he enjoys working there and how thankful he is for this wonderful opportunity. Congratulations Victor!



## Congratulations Kathy Bullano!

Congratulations on your thirty years of achievement with Telamon Corporation. You have been an integral and major part of Virginia's success over these many years. Since I came in 1998, you have never failed to demonstrate anything but a sincere dedication to your customers and the mission of Telamon. Your professionalism, hard work, strong work ethic, and commitment to excellence have been outstanding and these qualities are reflected in the many success stories your customers embody. Your energy and willingness to fight for your customers is commendable.

Over the years, I've been impressed with your leadership, knowledge, experience, and passion to excel. Your customers' satisfaction and appreciation are evident from comments they have made about not only your work, but also about you as a person. Their success is truly your success.

Your ability to be a strong leader in your community is a testament to your strength of character and your commitment to workforce development. It has been obvious on many occasions that you are a respected colleague within the workforce development community.

I am so pleased that you work in Virginia. Throughout the years, you have always been willing to share your thoughts, suggestions,

knowledge, and experience with me and you have contributed much to other staff – always willing to share resources and lend a helping hand to your co-workers.

Telamon, other staff, supervisors, me, and most of all, your customers, are fortunate to have had the pleasure of working with you. On behalf of Telamon, please accept my sincere gratitude and appreciation for your many years of service.

Sincerely,  
Sharon Saldarriaga  
State Director



A big welcome to Douglas Adams, the new Program Office Assistant in the Danville, Virginia office. The Danville office is excited to have such an intelligent, diverse, energetic, creative, and passionate person on board. Good luck, buena suerte, Douglas! May you have great success in your future with Telamon Corporation.

## I Just Want an Opportunity

By Ana Nethken  
Workforce Development Specialist, Harrisonburg

Johana Campos came to Telamon Corporation in Harrisonburg, Virginia in March of 2013. She qualified for the National Farmworker Jobs Program as a dependent of her seasonal farmworker mother. She has faced many barriers in life since she was little and Johana was seeking help and support. As she expressed in her first interview with Telamon, “I just want to have an opportunity to improve my life, to help my mother and my three little brothers. I am the oldest of four children and want to be an example for them. I want my family to be proud of me.” She finished high school and she was looking for employment. Through interviews and assessment, we quickly determined that Johana possessed fantastic personal traits, including a superior work ethic and sense of responsibility. However, she also faced several barriers to improving employment: insufficient work history, undeveloped work skills, and lack of transportation. Immediately we began designing solutions to open a pathway for her to succeed. Johana stated that she had an interest in health care after her experience of caring for her grandmother in New Jersey.

Career assessment showed that Johana’s interests were aligned with her career goals in

the health field. We suggested Johana pursue a Nursing Assistant Certificate. She agreed this was a good option and began to see new possibilities and hopes for her own future. Plus, she had always been very interested in helping other people.



Johana and Bobby at Life Care Center

Telamon assisted Johana with developing a plan to becoming a Certified Nursing Assistant. Johana was then placed in classroom training at Valley Vocational Center where she would work toward achieving her goals. Her two-month training began in August, 2013 for 12 hours a

week. The program further assisted her by purchasing things such as uniforms and a nursing practice kit. Support was provided until she could start earning steady income.

She completed her training on November 15, 2013. After that, Johana attended Job Readiness and Financial Literacy classes to get her prepared for the workplace. We collaborated with her to begin searching for a job by establishing networking relationships with potential employers, applying for jobs, and making appointments. Johana visited and interviewed with care centers, nursing homes, and the coordinator at Shenandoah Valley.

With Telamon’s assistance and referral, Johana was hired in less than eleven days. On November 26, Bobby Founkouser, the HR Program Coordinator at Life Care Center, offered Johana a full-time job. This was a major milestone for her: a permanent job with health benefits.

Johana thanks us greatly for our support and she is very much enjoying her first job. She said, “I thank God, my mother, and Bobby for providing me this employment opportunity. I thank the National Farmworker Jobs Program and Telamon for opening the door and helping me take the first step. Now, I feel more confident and capable. I can help my mother and be a positive example for my little brothers.”

## Endless Possibilities

By Lorena McQueen  
Field Service Rep., Harrisonburg

When Mushtaq Al Saedi came to our Harrisonburg Office, he had a great attitude. With his potential, there were endless possibilities for obtaining a better job. As we began the intake process, we found that Mushtaq wasn't able to communicate with us directly. He had limited English skills, so he brought someone to translate for him. Other obstacles to employment included limited work history and lack of transportation. He felt like he had no hope for a better future and exclaimed, "Nobody can help me. I have bills to pay and I need a better job."

Mushtaq came from Iraq to the United States in 2011 as a refugee. He had worked exclusively in farmwork his whole life. As soon as he came here, he started working as a seasonal farmworker at a greenhouse in Shenandoah. He desperately wanted a better job with full-time year-round work. The first thing we did was to assess Mushtaq and look for ways to improve his education and job opportunities. Mushtaq enrolled in evening classes at Massanutten Technical Center two nights a week. He took English as a Second Language in order to improve his communication skills.

Telamon advised and coached Mushtaq. We also provided financial



support to address the most immediate problems he faced when he began the program. Support included short-term nutritional assistance and emergency housing assistance.

We developed Mushtaq's potential through classes including Job Readiness, Financial Literacy, and Computer Literacy. He enjoyed attending these classes at our office and we were able to help him learn valuable skills including job search techniques, career exploration, resume writing, interviewing, and job success. He also learned about keeping a checking account, how to save, and how to build a good credit history. He said the Financial Literacy class was one of the most useful trainings he had ever received because he learned so many things that would help him throughout his life.

By this time, Mushtaq was ready to begin applying for jobs around the area. We helped him apply to many local employers. After a successful interview with Cargill Meat Solutions, Mushtaq was offered a job working 40-50 hours per week at \$11.25 per hour. He is so happy. Now he can pay his rent, buy food, and even set aside money so he will be able to buy a car. Mushtaq expressed his sincere appreciation for Telamon and the National Farmworker Jobs Program. With the assistance, support, and guidance he received, he was able to reach his goals.

### State Director's Message

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technical monitoring process, as well as information on the weatherization assistance program provider application process.

The lack of immigration reform continues to impact our farmworker population. We are hopeful that something will pass to enable more farmworkers and others to come out of the shadows and participate more fully in the education, training, and employment opportunities, which are available in the Commonwealth. Young people who were brought here at an early age and who graduated from Virginia high schools still cannot qualify for in-state tuition. We currently are waiting to see if Virginia will pass legislation that has been introduced this year that will permit in-state tuition for these students.

Congratulations to Kathy Bullano on her thirty years with Telamon. She is the Workforce Development Specialist in our Danville office and has helped countless farmworkers and their families achieve a better life (*see letter to Kathy, page 2*).

We also wish to congratulate Suzanne Orozco who has been selected as the new Executive Director of Telamon Corporation. Our current Executive Director, Richard Joanis, will retire this month after more than 38 years with the corporation. We are grateful for his efforts in leading the organization into the 21st century and transforming it over the years from a small, singularly-focused organization serving migrant and seasonal farmworkers to one of over seventy programs serving a wide array of disadvantaged populations in eleven states. We wish him a well-deserved, happy, and successful retirement.