

Telamon—Virginia

August 2014

Empowering Individuals, Improving Communities

Message from the State Director Sharon Saldarriaga

As we enter a new program year for many of our grants, I want to take a moment to congratulate all of our National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) staff for a successful year. All of our goals and performance standards were met or exceeded. Thanks to the staff's work, many farmworkers in the Commonwealth have been able to acquire higher education and skills that are helping them secure year round employment with good wages and benefits. We're also pleased to share that we again were awarded 2014-2015 Department of Labor funding to continue providing training and employment services to farmworkers in Virginia.

Housing programs continue to thrive. Department of Labor funding enables us to reach growers across Virginia to assist them

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Ana's Greenhouse

By Sara Lopez
Workforce Development Specialist,
Montross

When Ana Becerra applied to participate in the National Farmworker Jobs Program at Telamon Corporation's Montross location, she was a single mother whose only work history included working at nurseries planting and pruning plants and flowers.

Her employer of many years was close to retiring and she knew she would need to seek other employment for herself. One day, the owner of the nursery asked Ana if she would be interested in taking over some of the greenhouses and continuing in the same industry. Ana knew she was interested, but had to take some time to think about it and do additional research. She was worried about the financial aspects. Staff referred her to the Small Business Center and to the Farm Service Agency. Ana soon made up her mind that she



wanted to proceed with starting her own business.

She worked diligently with Mr. Hand, owner of Green Hand Nursery, toward developing her business plan and many other aspects of the business. He was a great mentor to her. Telamon also assisted her with financial literacy.

She recently started up her own business, "Ana's Greenhouse," and is so thrilled and proud of herself for making the most of this opportunity. Congratulations on the wonderful accomplishments Ana! We are proud of you too!

Alias' Success Story

By Ana Nethken
Workforce Development Specialist, Harrisonburg

Alias Khader came to the Telamon office in Harrisonburg on May 15, 2013 and enrolled in the National Farmworker Jobs Program. He had been working in the Shenandoah Growers Green House as a seasonal farmworker since he arrived from his country, Iraq. Alias had limited English proficiency and lacked a sufficient work history. He needed direction and assistance. Alias was looking for a better future to provide for his wife and his son, but he was struggling to meet his basic needs. After an informal interview, we administered a variety of assessment tests to identify his interests, aptitudes, and levels of basic skills. Then, we helped him develop a plan designed to improve his skills, address all barriers, and achieve his career goals.

Telamon staff coached and advised Alias, and provided short-term emergency assistance during the initial weeks. We provided his family with nutritional assistance and residential support. Also, we referred Alias to community partners for additional services, such as Social Services for their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Once his immediate situation began to stabilize, we identified long-term opportunities available



to Alias. He enrolled at Massanutten Technical Center for English as a Second Language. During this time, Alias' wife was pregnant, and he was definitely thinking and planning for the future of his growing family. His goal was to improve his English communication skills and apply for a coordinator position at the green house. In addition, we encouraged Alias to complete Computer Literacy and Job Readiness training to prepare him for interviews and to better equip him for the type of job he was seeking.

Throughout the process of achieving his goals, Alias always held firm to two fundamental values: persistence and perseverance. He never allowed challenges to prevent him from learning, and he endured through the most difficult times. Alias Khader completed an important step toward reaching his goals by earning two English as a Second Language certificates from Massanutten Technical Center in

Harrisonburg. His accomplishment was immediately rewarded by a promotion at work.

Alias was promoted to Coordinator in the Receiving department at Shenandoah Growers Green House. We call this type of promotion an agricultural upgrade, and for Alias it was great news. The promotion earned him an additional \$3.00 per hour compared to what he was making before. He now makes \$11.00 per hour.

Alias told us, "I am very happy with my promotion. I'm doing a job that I enjoy. I appreciate so much the assistance I received from your program when I really needed it." We see Alias as an example of how education leads to better opportunity in life. His story is another success for Telamon's National Farmworker Jobs Program. We are committed advocates for people in need and continue providing resources and creating opportunities in the communities we serve.

Keep on Truckin...

By Chris Hicks, Staff Writer

I would like to stay this story is unique. I would like to say it's rare or even unusual. But the truth is, this same story could be heard from many of the farm workers out on Virginia's Eastern Shore. It is a story about loss, hardship, and an exhausting struggle to get ahead. There are a few parts of this story, though, that are indeed unique: first, this story is about Calvin Berryhill Jr., and I challenge you to find a more unusual individual; second, this story is about how Calvin came to Telamon seeking assistance, and that makes Calvin one of the lucky few to find an agency that can help farm workers; and third, this story has a happy ending.

Calvin first came to the Telamon office in Exmore, Virginia back in the summer of 2011. He was 33 years old, single, and he worked as many hours as he was allowed at the Tankard Nursery. His finances were in shambles, he had no transportation, he barely subsisted from paycheck to paycheck, his housing situation was very strained, he depended on various family members to help out when they could, he was in debt to the state and the court system, and his prospects were limited.

Things had not always been so bad for Calvin. He had formerly been a truck driver and made a good wage. He got married and fathered two children. Life seemed good. Somewhere along the way, though, Calvin's life ran off the road. He got

into some legal trouble, resulting in minor charges, but these problems escalated. He lost his job. He lost his driver's license and his trucking license. He lost his marriage and his kids. At some point, it seemed that he also lost hope.

As time went on, the problems began to grow and become entangled. Because he lost his license, he could not find work. And without work, he could not earn enough money to pay the court fines and get his license back. The only way he could survive was to live with one family member or another and work as many hours as he could get at the nursery. Unfortunately, his child support payments were based on his old salary as a truck driver, so Calvin received almost no money from his paycheck. When he first came to the office, he just wanted a little money to pay for a pair of boots so he could do his job out in the muddy fields.

Calvin was extremely frustrated with his life. He told Telamon staff that he would like to fix it, if he could. He believed that if he could regain his license, then everything else would be manageable. The problem was, the problems; too many problems for him to fix by himself. Assessments showed that Calvin possessed aptitudes well-suited for truck driving, and that matched his desire. Staff worked with him to identify the individual obstacles that prevented Calvin from re-obtaining his credentials to drive a truck.

The first thing that needed to be addressed was the exorbitant child support payments that were clearly untenable for a seasonal farm worker. Telamon staff advocated for Calvin with the courts and the Child Support Enforcement agency and eventually Calvin's support payments were substantially reduced. This allowed for Calvin to begin saving a little money toward his fines and other debts.

One step forward, two steps back: Calvin was laid off from the nursery, then forced to work reduced hours due to weather and seasonal production changes; family tragedy and family turmoil cost Calvin in terms of both money and the stability of his housing situation. Often, Calvin came to the office with extreme frustration and would talk at length about his woes.

Over the course of a three-year period, with guidance, emergency assistance, and moral support, Calvin was able to little-by-little save up some money and finally one day he managed to pay off the last of his fines, got his truck-driving license re-instated, and secured employment with Ocean Petroleum. Calvin was ecstatic. He was so happy, in fact, he wrote a song about life and about Telamon. Helping him at that time was Nelson Diaz, Program Coordinator. Nelson told Calvin, "You just have to keep at it, brother. When life gets you down, you have to get back up, you know? You just have to keep on truckin..."

Collaboration + Determination = SUCCESS!

By Douglas Kendall Adams
Workforce Development Specialist . Danville

Determined to make a change and to have a better life, Anne Barksdale began reaching out to her community. This led her straight to the front door of Telamon Corporation in Danville, VA in November of 2013.

Anne spent a big part of her life as a seasonal tobacco and vegetable farmworker, and on her off time from the farm, she took small jobs working in tobacco warehouses as well as taking care of her terminally ill mother. She spent her life battling obstacle after obstacle and barrier after barrier. But, she went into each “battle” with a positive attitude and she successfully got through them all.

When she entered into the National Farmworker Jobs Program, Anne was going through another set of obstacles: she was unemployed, looking for a place to live, and had no transportation. Nonetheless, she remained positive and confident that she would survive. And that’s exactly what she did.

At the beginning, Anne came to Telamon in hopes that we could assist in finding her employment and also help her go to school so she could work in the healthcare field. Since she wanted to go into the health care field, we referred Anne to the Workforce Center (WFC) in Chatham, VA. The WFC

worked with Telamon to assist Anne toward her career goals and obtain the training she needed.

Through the collaboration between Telamon and the Chatham WFC, Anne was enrolled into the CNA program at Medical Solutions Academy, and shortly after finishing the certification, she was enrolled in the Medication Aide program (also from Medical Solutions Academy). The WFC in Chatham helped pay for Anne’s tuition, books, and uniforms for both programs and Telamon Corporation assisted her with support services for transportation and assisted her to overcome other barriers that cropped up and stood in her way.

While Anne was attending classes, we began pre-planning the next phase for when she completed her training and received her certifications. We began pre-employment training with Anne and conducted mock interviews. When we weren’t working one-on-one in the office with her, we were outside of the office conducting intensive job development so that we could ensure that when she finished school she would transition smoothly into a position in which she could utilize her new found skills and knowledge.

In June, shortly after Anne finished school, we sent her on an interview for a position as a Personal Care Aide at the Shomari Family Care in Yanceyville, NC. The employer was so impressed with Anne’s knowledge, personality, and positive attitude that he

wanted to hire her immediately. On June 24, 2014 Anne started her new full-time career with Shomari Family Care and loves her new position as a Personal Care Aide. She has also recently moved to Yanceyville, NC and is now removing barriers and obstacles on her own. When asked how everything was going, she smiled real big and she said, “Everything is going great! I still haven’t bought my car yet, but with my new job, I will have one soon.”

State Director’s Message

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with improvements to their farm labor housing. Our weatherization program, funded by the Department of Housing and Community Development, has expanded services from two counties to four. Our Pesticide Safety Program funded primarily by the Virginia Department of Agricultural Services, will surpass its annual goals this year due to the diligent work of our Pesticide and Workplace Safety Trainer. In addition to the pesticide trainings, which enable farmworkers to work more safely, 1095 farmworkers were provided with Heat Stress Prevention training.

Most importantly, we wish to say thank you to Amy Young and Greg Scheib from the Department of Labor for taking their time to visit our Harrisonburg NFJP office in June. They spent two days with us, visiting with staff, educational providers, community partners, participants, and growers.