

# Telamon—Virginia

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Empowering Individuals, Improving Communities

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Message from the State Director -  
Sharon L. Saldarriaga

Once again, Congress has been unable to pass legislation that would give millions of people who have been living, working, and contributing to this country's economy the legal means to start them on a path to earned citizenship. Comprehensive immigration reform failed, the Agricultural Job Opportunities, Benefits, and Security Act (AgJobs), which is specific to farmworkers, failed to pass, and the DREAM Act, which would open up higher educational opportunities to immigrants regardless of legal status, also was defeated.

In Virginia, the rising tide of anti-immigrant sentiment is astonishing. With more and more local jurisdictions opting to enter into agreements with immigration to allow local police to detain undocumented persons, the impact on Hispanic and other immigrant populations is devastating. Already there are reports of parents keeping their children out of school and pregnant mothers refraining from prenatal care. The trust that has been established over time between these communities and the local police is being quickly eroded.

Attempts to prove that these immigrants constitute a drain on state and local resources usually fall short. Study after study has shown that the economic benefits far outweigh any resources they may use. Reports from around the country talk about the shortage of workers that employers, particularly agricultural employers, are facing. With agriculture still the largest industry in the Commonwealth and one, along with many others, that is heavily dependent on immigrant labor, perhaps we should be developing solutions to immigration issues based on reasoned analysis rather than irrational fervor. §

## Telamon opens ¡CONEXIONES! Employment & Training Resource Center

By Nellie Vega  
Conexiones Coordinator  
Richmond

With funding from the Governor's Office of Workforce Development, Telamon opened a job resource center to target limited English proficient and other Latino job-seekers in the greater Richmond region and to help integrate them more fully into the workforce investment system. The center, named CONEXIONES- ENTRENAMIENTO Y TRABAJOS (Connections- Training and Employment), is co-located within the Richmond Career Advancement Center (RCAC) on Broad Street and provides a regular schedule of services at the RCAC Southside Community Center Satellite office at 4100 Hull Street. Soon, we will also provide services at the Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (VAHCC) and at other workforce agencies in the region.

While providing a variety of services to help people find jobs, particular attention will be given to linguistic and cultural barriers that negatively impact those seeking employment and those employers seek-

ing a viable workforce. Available services will include workplace literacy skills and pre-employment training workshops; access to ESL, GED, and computer instruction; assistance in developing resumes and in completing job applications, referrals to

local training and service agencies; and customized sector training in collaboration with businesses and community colleges.

Southside Richmond is an area with a high concentration of the Latino population, and the addition of Telamon's bilingual employment services fills a growing need. We are very excited to begin this program in collaboration with RCAC, the City of Richmond Hispanic Liaison Office, the VAHCC, and others. Telamon has been developing the model for this program for several years. It originated from the recognition that there are qualified jobseekers looking for jobs and there are employers looking for competent employees, yet the two were not always connecting because of language and cultural barriers. Thus the concept was named ¡CONEXIONES! Our goal is not to duplicate services that already exist for jobseekers in the Greater Richmond area, but to help limited



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### An Additional Housing Counselor in Danville

By Lynita Falls  
Housing Counselor  
Gretna

Kimberly Walker joins Gretna staff in a contracted position at the Danville Redevelopment and Housing Authority's HOPE VI site (Seeland Crossing community). Prior to employment at Telamon, Kim was a credit counselor at Clear



Point Financial and helped customers set up payment

arrangements with creditors and resolve their debt. She also originated mortgage loans at Allied Home Mortgage.

Kim will be working with the residents in the Seeland Crossing community and other Danville residents who want to live within her targeted community to prepare them for homeownership.

Kim resides in Danville with her husband, Melvin. She has four children and 5 grandchildren. She loves taking long drives thru rural areas and along the Blue Ridge Parkway. She also enjoys interior decorating and is very dedicated to her church, From the Heart Ministry.

Welcome aboard Kim. We look forward to working with you. §

### Telamon Welcomes Two New NFJP Staff

Telamon's National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) has two new additions to the team.

Maria Roe is the new Regional Manager in the Warsaw office.



Her article on the pesticide safety training appears on page 2. She joined us in April. Her previous positions include editing and reporting for the "El Diario" section of the Journal of King George. Her background is in Foreign Language Education. She believes that education is the most important thing a person can obtain and is anxious to create training opportunities that fit the needs of farmworkers in her area. She says "Low income Hispanic people have come to me for the past several years seeking help when they had no other place to turn to. The low wages some farm workers receive and the seasonal nature

of their employment make it hard for them and their families to survive in this country. I did what I could, although I had no resources to help them. When Telamon offered me a position to serve this population, they also offered the resources to better serve them. I am glad this opportunity exists for farmworkers."

Nelson Diaz began in July as the Regional Manager for the Central Virginia area. He will work from the administrative office in Richmond, but will serve the Southside and central Virginia areas. He has come to us from the Virginia Employment Commission where he was a Workforce Services Representative. He hails from Honduras and Miami and he brings a good working knowledge of workforce investment and what it takes to motivate others. We are very pleased to welcome both Maria and Nelson to Telamon. §



# Educating Farmworkers about Pesticide Exposure

*Originally printed in El Diario— The Journal of Kinge George*

By Marlene Larios  
Pesticida Safety Training  
and Maria Roe  
Regional Manager  
Montross, VA.

Recently, approximately 40 farmworkers attended a workshop on Pesticide Safety offered by Telamon Corporation. The workshop was free of charge and conducted in Spanish at the AT Johnson Community Building.

The agricultural workers in the United States comprise an important sector of the U.S. labor force. Their performance of numerous and varied agricultural tasks produces a large share of the nation's food supply and contributes significantly to U.S. exports \$62.2 billion in fiscal year 2004.

Based on data from the National Agricultural Survey, a large share of crop workers reported having completed relatively few years of formal education. Among all workers in the 2003-2004 survey, the median education level was sixth grade.

"Most of the workers come from very rural areas of Mexico; in some cases they do not even speak Spanish very well....they may speak a dialect that may not have a written form at all. This is one of the challenges that we face when

dealing with rural immigrant communities" said Marlene Larios who is the Pesticide Trainer for the program.

Training topics included: where and how we may encounter pesticides while at work; pesticide poisoning; recognizing symptoms; what to do in case of an emergency; keeping hydrated while you work; proper hand washing procedures; contaminated laundry instructions; and more.



The workshop lasted approximately one hour and 30 minutes. Participants were asked questions about the topics covered before and after the training. Upon completion they received Environmental Protection Cards that verify their participation in the training. The cards are valid for five years. Information materials such as books, poison control stickers with emergency phone numbers were also provided.

There were two representatives of the Telamon present. Mrs. Larios, who made the pesticide presentation and Mrs. Roe, who provided information about other services available through the Te-

lamon office in Warsaw. Many of the workers were interested in learning English and picked up cards and brochures with information about the classes.

Later, in a phone interview, Mr. Rod Parker, from Parker Farms, told El Diario that Telamon has been providing training for his employees for the last ten years. It was a program run through volunteers until they received support from the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VADACS) last October. "We have found it to be an excellent thing to help us to meet the requirements that are demanded of us. They have done a good job, and I think the boys appreciated it, as well as do I," said Parker.

Transportation was provided by the employer: Parker Farms. By having their workers trained, the farm owner complies with the requirement of the Worker Protection Standards for pesticide training.

The Worker Protection Standards are the federal regulations with which agricultural employers of farms, forests, nurseries and greenhouses must comply. The federal agency that oversees the pesticide training is the Environmental Protection Agency.

Telamon offers free pesticide safety training. The program is supported both by the VADACS and the National Farmworker Jobs Program. The service was introduced to the Northern Neck Vegetable Growers Association and also at a number of pesticide recertification meetings statewide. §

## Homeownership is a Lifetime Goal

By Lynita Falls  
Housing Counselor  
Gretna

Achieving the American dream of homeownership can be a long journey for most of our clientele. Credit issues, housing cost, very low income, and the fear of homeownership are some obstacles our clients face as they travel the journey toward homeownership. Thanks to housing programs and first-time homebuyer mortgage financing administered out of the Gretna Telamon office, more than 400 families in our seven county, two city service area in Southside Virginia have achieved their dream of homeownership.

Telamon—Gretna, through a field office in Danville, offers extensive credit counseling and a mortgage readiness program (Homebuyer's Education Club) to the residents of Danville Redevelopment and Housing Authority public housing complexes. Telamon started its third Homebuyer's Club in March 2007. Attendees participated in twelve group meetings and individual sessions over the past five months.

The families came to group meetings to learn about various topics that include:

Getting Organized; Savings; VIDA Program; Understanding, Repairing, and Cleaning Up Credit Reports; Budgeting; Money Management; Identity



Alfrieta Bennett-Reeves, a local real estate agent speaks to the homebuyer's class about working with a real estate agent

Theft; First Time Homebuyer's Loan Products and qualifications for these specific products; Fair Housing; and Working with a Realtor. This class had eleven gradu-

ates. Four of the graduates, with assistance from Ruth Ann Ball, Housing Counselor, have overcome their barriers to homeownership and should be purchasing a home within the next three to four months.

In talking with participant, Sharon Craft, she commented that these educational classes have helped her learn how to budget her money. It also made her think more when she goes to make a purchase, "Is this a need or a want." She said, "Tracking my expenses has made me realize how much a purchase is costing me" (cost of buying something on credit). She has been very appreciative of the education offered by Telamon.

As a fun night for the participants, Telamon had "House Bingo" night. The families played bingo by an-

swering questions as a review of everything they had learned the past four months. Instead of numbers on the bingo cards, the answers to the questions were on the cards. Telamon solicited prizes from area businesses and the participants really enjoyed the review night.

Purchasing a home can be a lifetime achievement, especially for households with incomes less than 80 percent of area median income. Telamon—Gretna has many success stories from families who never dreamed they could purchase a home. Most of our clientele are credit challenged when it comes to purchasing a house. Here in Gretna, we encourage our clients to work through whatever issue is standing between them and their goal of homeownership. Our motto is we do not say no, we say not right now. §



**Training is a Family Affair on the Eastern Shore**

Sharleen Drummond  
Casemanager  
Exmore

Telamon in Belle Haven has two new enrollees into a Registered Nurse Program and a Licensed Practical Nurse Program at the Eastern Shore Community College. Eloisa Rea and Mayra Nuñez are mother and daughter. They are currently completing their summer semester and are registered for their fall classes.



Eloisa is a mother to 4 girls ranging from age 4 to 18. Mayra is the oldest at age 18. She has

been employed with Byrd Foods for 18 years and is now ready for a change. She is determined to get through the LPN program.

Mayra began working at age 16 at the Byrd Foods packing house. She soon realized she didn't want to do this for the rest of her life. She recently graduated from a high school in Texas and now lives on the Eastern Shore. She is currently attending the Registered Nurse Program.

Both Eloisa and Mayra are wonderful ladies who have met and completed all tasks given by Telamon. They are goal oriented and will be wonderful nurses with their charismatic and compassionate personalities. Upon completion of their degree, they will be an asset to any employer due to their new skills and their bilingual capability.

Eloisa is due to complete the Licensed Practical Nurse program in 16-24 months including pre-requisite courses, while Mayra is due to complete the Registered Nurse Program in 48 months due to two years of prerequisite courses. §

**Walker Somerville a Fellow from SAF, at Telamon**

By Soraya Buckner  
Regional Manger  
Exmore

This summer, Walker Summer-ville served as a fellow from SAF. He said he chose Telamon because he wanted to learn more about farm-worker issues and their job conditions.



Walker is fluent in Spanish and in his second year of college at William and Mary University. He studies International Relations and has traveled to Spain, Guatemala, and Honduras. He is planning a trip to Argentina very soon. It has been amazing to watch how quickly he became integrated into our office and our dynamic. He arrived at the moment when workers began coming to our office looking for assistance with food and pesticide training and had very little time for instruction on his project.

He has helped to provide food and process applications. He has provided pesticide training and done outreach with our casemanager. He has presented pre-employment classes and has provided an overview of our services to potential customers. He is not afraid to talk with them and invite them to learn more about our programs. He is an avid photographer and has documented the whole summer in photos. He has been a great asset this summer and we all enjoyed his company. With his enthusiasm and intelligence, we know Walker will go very far in life. We were glad to have him with us if only for just this short time. §

**Networking with Other Agencies to Better Serve Our Community**

Lynita Falls  
Housing Counselor  
Gretna

In celebration of National Homeownership Month, Gretna hosted a Networking Open House at the Telamon—Danville Housing Office at 3 Park Avenue Extension on June 21, 2007. The “Networking Open House” allowed area housing providers and community service based organizations to network together to learn the services that each agency offers. The general public was invited to participate, also.

Representatives from other service agencies in attendance included Danville/Pittsylvania County Habitat for Humanity, Danville Redevelopment and Housing Authority’s HOPE VI, Pittsylvania County Community Action Agency’s Section 8, Rural Development, The City of Danville’s Community Housing and Development Division, and Virginia Housing and Development Authority. Bank of America, First Citizens, and Wachovia Mortgage are three local banks that offer affordable first-time homebuyer products and attended.

A “BIG” thank you goes out to Virginia Housing and Development Authority’s Reach Program for sponsoring our event and donating box lunches for everyone. Also, a special thank you goes out to Welcome Home Realty for allowing us to use additional office space to host this event. §

*Conexiones! continued*

English proficient jobseekers access those services. This program will benefit not just employers and jobseekers but the community as a whole by helping to integrate Hispanics into the greater fabric of the area.

According to the Richmond Workforce Investment Board, between 2000 and 2010, there will be a major increase in the 55+ population. Naturally, the job market will have fewer entry-level workers. Employers are now turning to non-traditional sources of labor, like immigrant populations, to fill these jobs. Currently, there are an estimated 45,000 Latinos living in the area. In the ten years between the 1990 and the 2000 Census, this population has grown by 220% and is expected to continue to increase.

The center just opened two months ago, and is already getting customers enrolled into the VEC system, connecting our customers with other resources and employers, and getting customers ready for job interviews. We assisted more than 15 customers with resume and cover letter preparation. We receive around 30 weekly phone calls from employers and job seekers. Our resource center is growing fast and we expect numbers to increase. We have scheduled one of our workplace skills workshops for August 25<sup>th</sup> @ Chester Public Library.

There are many Latinos residing in the area who want to connect to employment and/or training resources that enable them to upgrade their language, educational and/or occupational skills to become more competitive in the workplace. Yet, studies show it takes 3-5 years to develop oral proficiency and 4-7 years to develop academic proficiency in English. These statistics indicate a need for a more customized method for serving limited English proficient job seekers and employers with open positions in the area. This is what our program hopes to achieve. §

## Speaking a Little English is Insufficient to Obtain a Good Job

By Maria Roe  
Regional Manger  
Warsaw

This is the story I wrote when my intention was merely to intake information for some notes in a client's file. As I reflected on the reason why she was a good candidate to obtain benefits from Telamon, I found myself excited about letting people know about the exquisite young lady Monica is. I tried to put on paper the perils she had experienced coming to this country, but I must talk about the tremendous joy I experienced in helping train such a hopeful, hard working young mother. She wants to make it in this country and she will, because she is doing everything right to make it.

She came to my office after attending a presentation at the church she was attending. She has been coming to my office once or twice a week since then to attend ESL classes and to obtain other training and counseling.

Monica is a bright young lady who, having been raised along with four other siblings in Mexico, was supported by her father, a seasonal worker employed in the agriculture in our area."

Until the entire family relocated to the U.S. a couple of years ago, Monica's father went back to Mexico at the end of the agricultural season every year to be with them. Then he would return to Virginia by himself, leaving his wife in charge of everything for another nine months.

Monica was able to attend one year of college in Mexico, but when she came to this country, the English courses she had studied there were insufficient for her to pursue her education. She was one of the two siblings who weren't allowed to attend our public high schools to further her education here either.

Due to the language barriers and the lack of opportunities for her to learn

in rural Virginia, she became discouraged after the initial excitement of being in a foreign country. She learned quickly that the education barriers also limited her ability to obtain the kind of jobs she had dreamed to attain. Transportation was also a challenge in our rural area.

She began to work in agriculture, the only work she was able to get. She learned quickly that because of the low wages paid there, it would be difficult for her to save enough to attend a college, buy a car, and pay the necessary expenses to maintain it.

A bit disheartened by her new situation, she found hope when she met a young man of Hispanic heritage and shortly after, she left her parents' home. She became pregnant; at about the same time her boyfriend was picked up by the police and incarcerated.

She returned to her parents' home where she was welcomed with open arms and went back to the Catholic Church. She also began to attend the ESL classes a volunteer was teaching there.

Upon my presentation, she learned we could help her undergo training and help support her with counseling and some financial assistance while she trained and she requested our services.

While she continued attending the ESL classes at the church, even at times when she was the only student there, she began attending ESL classes at the VEC office on Fridays.

Once enrolled, she was even more motivated and hopeful about her future. I observed the changes in her the next week and literally witnessed her blossom.

It is imperative for our customers to learn English in order to receive training, because, realistically speaking, very few companies will be able to provide the instruction in their native

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## 10 Reasons to Eat Local Food

**Eating local means more for the local economy.** According to a study by the New Economics Foundation in London, a dollar spent locally generates twice as much income for the local economy. When businesses are not owned locally, money leaves the community.

**Locally grown produce is fresher.** While produce that is purchased in the supermarket has been in transit or cold-stored for days or weeks, produce that you purchase at your local farmer's market has often been picked within 24 hours of your purchase. This freshness not only affects the taste of your food, but the nutritional value which declines with time.

**Local food just plain tastes better.** Ever tried a tomato that was picked within 24 hours? 'Nuff said.

**Locally grown fruits and vegetables have longer to ripen.** Because the produce will be handled less, locally grown fruit does not have to be "rugged" or to stand up to the rigors of

shipping. This means that you are going to be getting peaches so ripe that they fall apart as you eat them and melons that were allowed to ripen until the last possible minute on the vine.

**Eating local is better for air quality and pollution than eating organic.** In a March 2005 study by the journal Food Policy, it was found that the miles that organic food often travels to our plate creates environmental damage that outweighs the benefit of buying organic.

**Buying local food keeps us in touch with the seasons.** By eating with the seasons, we are eating foods when they are at their peak taste, are the most abundant, and the least expensive.

**Buying locally grown food is fodder for a wonderful story.** Whether it's the farmer who brings apples to market or the baker who makes bread, knowing part of the story about your food is such a powerful

part of enjoying a meal.

**Eating local protects us from bioterrorism.** Food with less distance to travel from farm to plate has less susceptibility to harmful contamination.

**Local food translates to more variety.** When a farmer is producing food that will not travel a long distance, will have a shorter shelf life, and does not have a high-yield demand, the farmer is free to try small crops of various fruits and vegetables that would probably never make it to a large supermarket. Supermarkets are interested in selling "Name brand" fruit like Romaine Lettuce and Red Delicious Apples. Local producers often play with their crops from year to year.

**Supporting local providers supports responsible land development.** When you buy local, you give those with local open space. An economic reason to stay open and undeveloped.

*Reprinted from [http://fogcity.blogs.com/jen/2005/08/10\\_reasons\\_to\\_e.html](http://fogcity.blogs.com/jen/2005/08/10_reasons_to_e.html)  
For more info see [www.eatlocalchallenge.com](http://www.eatlocalchallenge.com)*

## Mobile Mexican Embassy on the Eastern Shore

By Dulce Torres  
Program Office  
Assistant  
Exmore

The staff at Telamon in Exmore recently helped to plan a visit from the Mobile Mexican Embassy here at the Eastern Shore. We helped to arrange for volunteers to give appointments for passports, matriculas (Mexican ID's) and registration of Mexican children in the U.S.

The first day of the appointments, there were close to 100 people waiting outside the office. We gave appointments for 5 days and after we finished giving appointments we still had people calling the office asking for appointments. Many people didn't get to be seen, because they didn't schedule an appointment or didn't bring the



right documents.

While waiting for Consulate visit, planners called other agencies to see if they were able to assist with the event. We had Bank of America, DMV, Eastern Shore Community College, and of course, Telamon.

Bank of America open at least 200 checking accounts on those two days, and DMV was there to answer any question people had about getting VA plates or licenses. And the Eastern Shore Community College was there to give them information about free English classes. Telamon was there to talk about our program and gave out flyers and information about the program what it is and what it does.

On those two weekend days, there

were 650 appointments and the Mobile Mexican Embassy passed out 920 documents. Bank of America generously paid for the volunteers lunches which include over 30 people. The event took place in a church "El Candelero de Oro" and the congregation made the food, so Bank of America paid the church.

This event really helped the Mexicans on the Eastern Shore. Since they didn't have any kind of ID, they were able to get one. Many people were really thankful to the staff of Telamon who volunteered their time on the weekend to bring the Mexican Embassy to the Shore. And we did our best to try to help all the people we could. This event was something that we will never forget. §



*A little English, continued from page 6*

language, especially in our rural area.

Because our program is not designed for indefinite training, it is important that our customers become fluent as soon as possible. Therefore, I also wanted to learn the different levels of the students needing classes, and the number of classes they would attend per week to be able to make arrangements for them, rather than paying for a multilevel class.

It was obvious to me that for students like Monica, who were willing to do the work and eager to learn as much as possible, a multilevel class would not be efficient. I also concluded that having a bilingual instructor would speed up learning.

The classes were made available to all customers in order to better

prepare them for work or enable them to participate in other training.

During that time, Monica prepared herself to learn how to drive and applied for a job at a newly-opened children's center for migrants. She successfully passed the driving test. She has now a valid Virginia driver's license, and is working at the children's center part-time.

Although Monica enjoys working there, and the center provides free daycare for her while she works, she wants to access a full-time, well-paid job in the future, which will require a higher education or training from her. Merely speaking Spanish and "some English" we know is not a ticket for a good salary or employment unless it is accompanied by other skills.

She has recently requested to have her ESL classes increased to

three times per week, working from her home by translating from newspapers and other material, organizing vocabulary lists, noting questions to ask her instructor, reading, etc. and began computer training at the VEC as well. She understands the importance of learning the language and the culture, the need to be consistent in her efforts to get ready to access other courses, and job placement to access better compensated employment.

Monica wants to prepare herself to attain another job when the present one closes, and to continue her education and training. Therefore, Monica is requesting services from Telamon to make the transition to a better-paid full-time employment with benefits that will allow her to become financially independent and to raise her child. I am confident this young lady will succeed. §

By Nelson Diaz  
Regional Manager  
Richmond

Just a few weeks after being hired as a Regional Manager for the NFJP, I have come to respect and admire those who work for this great organization.

I grew up in a very small and poor country where options were few. Since I was very little, I had to learn about sacrifices and rewards. So much so that I think about them every day. Opportunity came when I arrived in the USA in 1990. I realized that I had to learn English as soon as possible. I went to class at night and worked during the day. But I didn't need to speak English in the factory where I was working so I quit the classes. As time passed, I began to understand the American culture and decided to go back to school. Then, I went to college to study business ad-

ministration. I knew that I did not want to work all my life in that factory and if I sacrificed just a little bit more, I could live a comfortable life.

My first reward came when I accepted a position in international marketing for a big company in Miami. After four years in that position and another position, I decided to move to Richmond. But I knew that this move would be a little easier because I had already conquered my biggest barrier to success, the language. I joined the Virginia Employment Commission and then worked for a program funded by the Department of Labor providing job search assistance. I continued exploring, learning and understanding workforce development.

I worked there until April when I learned more about Telamon and the NFJP program. The NFJP is a wonderful program. It is good to know that a program like this is available to

farmworkers who struggle. Most of them do not earn enough to get educated or to obtain a proper training to perform jobs outside of farmwork.

To be able to make a positive difference in other people's lives through education is something very close to my heart and to which I am very committed. The other day, I was talking to a customer in the program and he was told me he moved from Texas because there was no more work on the farm where he was working. It is hard to think that when people cannot find work in their hometowns, they must look elsewhere and many times when they get somewhere else, they can't find a job because of their lack of education and training.

Now my goal is simply to develop a plan based on positive communication and to quickly and efficiently serve customers and work together to cultivate new hope. §