

# Telamon—Virginia

February 2016

*Empowering Individuals, Improving Communities*

## Message from the State Director Sharon Saldarriaga

National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) staff just returned from a conference in Washington, DC where they had an opportunity to meet with our elected officials and their legislative aides. I want to thank all of them for taking the time out of their incredibly busy schedules to hear about our programs and services that assist farmworkers and growers. Staff also shared some of their success stories and the impact the NFJP, housing, and pesticide safety training programs have on the communities we serve. We are grateful for the ongoing bipartisan support for the NFJP. I also want to give special thanks to Representative Rob Wittman

*(Continued on page 3)*

## In this issue

<i>An Opportunity to Prosper</i> .....	1
<i>Jane is Serious about her Work</i> .....	2
Staff Notes .....	3
Virginia Housing Program .....	3
Cover story (continued from page 1).....	4

## An Opportunity to Prosper

By Douglas Kendall Adams  
Workforce Development Specialist, Danville

Like many of the clients we serve in Danville, Michael Wiles worked most of his life in the tobacco fields planting, picking, and topping. The labor is extremely difficult and the conditions often harsh, but when you need to put food on the table you do what you must. Michael survived and he managed to support himself and his family.

In the summer of 2013, Michael was working on a small tobacco farm in Ringgold, an unincorporated community in Pittsylvania County not far from the city of Danville. In August, Michael's job was terminated because the owner had run out of work for him. Michael couldn't afford to stay unemployed. He had a wife and three sons at home that depended on him. Immediately, Michael started looking for other jobs, but had a hard time finding any work he was qualified to perform. Just like so many other farmworkers, his skills were limited to the fields and opportunities were scarce.

After two months of filling out applications and pleading for inter-



views, Michael started to feel desperate. He was losing hope of finding work and scared for his family. He had run out of places to look for a job and had asked nearly everyone he knew for ideas. As the leaves just began to start changing, so did Michael's luck. One of his friends told him about Telamon.

The Telamon office in Danville offers training and employment services through the National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP). With funding from the U.S. Department of Labor, Telamon is able to assist farmworkers like Michael by providing the resources they need to overcome challenges and open new opportunities to become self-sustaining.

Michael completed an application for NFJP enrollment in October 2013 and was determined to be

*(Continued on page 4)*

# Jane is Serious About Her Work

By Sara Lopez  
Workforce Development  
Specialist, Montross

When Jane first came to enroll with Telamon, her father was a farmworker. He worked hard to support her and Jane could see how difficult it was to survive on a farmworker's income. She wanted to continue her education so she could find a better way to earn money, but the family's low income made things difficult. Jane was taking classes at the local community college, but frequently was unable to do her schoolwork because the electricity got shut off when they couldn't pay the bills.

Jane came to our office seeking guidance and was very unsure about which educational and employment paths she wanted to take. She had a deep desire to continue her education and succeed in life. We partnered with a few churches and were able to provide supportive services for her to make sure this wouldn't affect her ability to get her school work done. Jane also faced transportation issues and we were able to help.

Jane lacked work history and really wanted to obtain some experience. We were able to partner with a local business to provide a work-experience opportunity for her. During our continuous follow



up, her supervisor would always tell us that Jane exceeded their expectations.

We partnered with the local Virginia Employment Commission and were able to co-enroll Jane and leverage funding. Jane decided to begin taking CDL (certified

instructor told her that she was a natural and that she did the best job out of all the other students that day.

During and after her completion of training, Telamon staff assisted Jane with financial literacy, computer literacy, and pre-employment training. She agreed that she benefited a lot from all of them.

She started seeking employment right away but had some trouble obtaining full time employment due to an accident on her record that wasn't quite two years old. Jane definitely did not let that slow her down. She showed great persistence and patience. Shortly after a referral from us, she was hired by Virginia Paving Company and is now making more money than she ever has before.



She laughingly told us that her supervisor tells her that she drives better than most of the male drivers and always praises her for how quickly she catches on. She truly loves her job.

driver) classes, which is non-traditional training for women. Her first day of training went great. She excitedly told staff that her

We are so proud of Jane! Her hard work paid off! We wish Jane much continued success in her future.

## State Director’s Message

*(Continued from page 1)*

who has been an outstanding friend to the agricultural community and congratulate him on his decision to run for Governor of the Commonwealth.

## Staff Notes

Telamon employees truly embrace **CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**. Being open to change, we work in a constantly evolving environment. In recognition of performance and job growth, we’ve had three recent promotions - Congratulations!

**Zugey Ramos:** Workforce Development Specialist (WDS) I

**Wendy McRae:** Weatherization Program Support Specialist

**Richard Ruffin:** Weatherization Program Coordinator

We also welcome re-hire, **Magaly Quinones Guzman**, as WDS II for the Harrisonburg office.

## Telamon - Virginia Housing Program

By Tytiana Dennis  
Housing Program Coordinator



### Located in Danville

Telamon provides counseling and housing-related services for south central Virginia. Call for an appointment at our new location:

**2943 Riverside Dr Ste D  
Danville, VA 24541  
(434) 421-6491**



### Housing Counseling

Telamon is a HUD Approved Counseling Agency. A coun-

selor is available to provide financial literacy education, homeownership workshops, pre-purchase counseling to potential homebuyers, post-purchase, foreclosure prevention, and rental counseling.

### CHDO Single Family Rehabilitation for the City of Danville

Telamon is a designated Community Housing and Development



Organization (CHDO) for the City of Danville. This enables Tela-

mon to purchase and rehabilitate properties in the City’s targeted neighborhoods. Rehabilitated homes are available for purchase by low- to moderate-income homebuyers. Assistance with down payment and closing costs may be available to eligible households. Contact our office if you are interested in purchasing one of these beautiful homes.

### Homeless Assistance

- Ms. H. is a single mother with five children. Her home had major health issues due to mold and the whole family was evicted illegally. She stayed with family and friends until she received help from STEP, Inc. through their Homeless Intervention Program. Telamon had a vacant house and we

were able to enroll Ms. H. in our lease-purchase program. STEP paid her security deposit, utility deposit, and first month’s rent to give her a chance to get back on her feet. Ms. H. has already found a great new job, and the whole family loves the house. Ms. H. is now working to build her credit so she can purchase the home as quickly as possible.

- Ms. P. and her two kids had been living in a local motel, but they were about to be evicted because they couldn’t pay any longer. Telamon partnered with local agencies and churches to find assistance. To keep the family off the street, a friend of mine paid for 3 nights at the motel. By then we were able to contact Danville Social Services to pay another 7 nights. Finally, STEP, Inc. was able to locate a rental home and pay the deposits and rent. The family is doing great now.

*(Cover Story Continued from page 1)*

eligible for the program. NFJP is not a social support program where people apply only to receive subsidies. NFJP provides an active workforce development program. The client, with expert one-on-one coaching from our staff, pursues an individualized plan to address barriers to employment. Michael met with a Workforce Development Specialist (WDS), who explained the program to him and told him about the many different kinds of service.

At first, Michael's priority was to find a job as quickly as possible. As he continued to meet with his WDS, Michael began to understand that his lack of skills, due to his long-time employment in agriculture, was one of the big problems in finding work. Before coming to Telamon, he never really believed he had other options. He wanted a job that would provide for his family, but to get that job, he realized he needed to learn new skills.

Michael talked to the WDS about some of the options. If he completed trade school and obtained certification, he should be able to find secure, full-time employment. With a certified trade skill, he would be able to bring in enough income for his family to do more than just survive. If he were successful, his family would prosper. Michael liked this idea, yet he hesitated because the time he spent in school would be time away from work. He went home and

talked to his wife and they both decided it would be worth it. With assistance from Telamon, Michael believed he could make it happen, that he could finish school and be in a better position faster than he could by himself.

The next step was to complete a battery of tests and assessments to make sure he was working toward a suitable career goal and that he could meet all the requirements. Once again, Michael had some good luck, because his assessment and test results aligned with a high-demand career field that he found interesting. His scores indicated he was a good match for a career in Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC). Knowing he now had support from Telamon, Michael was excited about obtaining an HVAC certification.

Once the goal was clear, Michael and the WDS developed an Individualized Employment Plan to map out his career path and define the objectives. Michael was enrolled in the HVAC program at the Danville Community College and applied for Financial Aid to see what kind of help he could get to cover his tuition and books.

While Michael was attending school, Telamon provided support services to help cover school-related costs such as the purchase of tools mandatory for HVAC training. When emergencies came up, or when he couldn't quite make ends meet, Michael was able to get assistance with household expenses such as rent or utilities,

so he wouldn't have to drop out of school. Since he was driving back and forth to school each week, Michael received a weekly payment to help cover the cost of gas. With Telamon's support, Michael was able to meet every challenge.

When the time for graduation began to approach, Telamon provided in-depth pre-employment training. The school taught Michael the technical skills needed to do his job, and Telamon helped teach Michael the many soft skills needed to get a job and keep it. Pre-employment training included things like how to prepare and dress for an interview and tips on completing and following through on applications. The WDS also provided help designing and writing an attractive, professional resume.

Michael graduated from Danville Community College with an HVAC Certification in July 2015 and was inducted into the National Technical Honor Society.

As a result of the coaching and training from Telamon, he was highly prepared to begin a job search. In fact, Michael was so well-prepared and highly qualified that he was able to start a new job just one week after graduation.

Within the first six months working full-time at Comfort Cooling Heating and Air, Michael received promotion to Lead Supervisor. Congratulations Michael! We are so very happy and proud of you for all of your accomplishments!