

# Telamon—Virginia

May 2016

*Empowering Individuals, Improving Communities*

## Message from the State Director Sharon Saldarriaga

It is with mixed feelings that I write this last column as I am retiring at the end of June. Telamon has been my family for 35 years, first in Delaware, then in Virginia. When I started, it didn't take long for me to appreciate the incredible contributions that farmworkers provide to our nation, to understand the many hardships they endure, and to develop effective strategies to address the challenges they face. I also have had the pleasure of overseeing Head Start programs, in-school and out-of-school youth programs, and our housing programs, which have helped countless Virginia residents save on energy costs and benefit from home ownership opportunities. I want to express my gratitude and deeply felt thanks for all the partners who have contributed so much to our success in serving our customers. We could not have done it without you.

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## Cultural Activities

By Sara Lopez  
Workforce Development  
Specialist II, Montross

We want to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Theodore H. Barth Foundation, Inc. for their continued

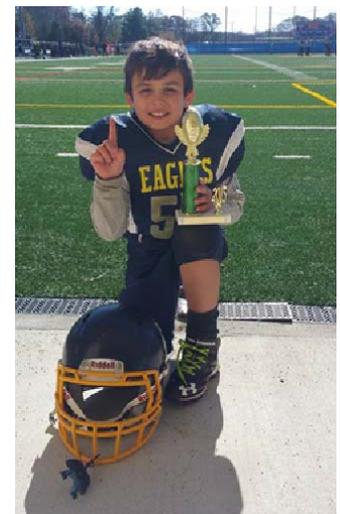


support. With a generous grant each year, Telamon is able to provide farmworker children with opportunities and experiences that promote cultural enrichment.

activities, but many are unable to do so due to financial hardship. We seek to provide activities that engage, enrich, and help farmworker children attain their full potential. We also want them to have fun. Some of the many opportunities provided through this grant include: art, music, dance, reading, and sports.

All children deserve the opportunity to participate in such ac-

tivities, but many are unable to do so due to financial hardship.



## Piloting Your Dreams

By Douglas Kendall Adams  
Workforce Development  
Specialist II, Danville

Andrew Scruggs grew up working on a tobacco farm. Hard work and early childhood responsibilities were common to Andrew. Even though he had a family background that could have afforded him a life in the agricultural world, Andrew had other dreams. Ever since he was a little boy, while planting and picking tobacco, he dreamed of becoming an airplane pilot.

Andrew had been enrolled in Averett University's Aviation program, but he was struggling to succeed as a student due to a multitude of barriers. Andrew left school and went back to work on the farm until he came across a flyer advertising the employment and training services that Telamon had to offer. He decided to visit the Telamon office in Danville. After that, it was clear skies for Andrew.

The journey was a long and hard one. Becoming a pilot was hard, but with Telamon's help, Andrew was provided many services to assist him on his journey. Telamon's assistance with needs related payments helped him focus on all of the hard and demanding work needed to fulfill his dream of graduating and becoming a pilot. His work consisted of many hours

of book work along with many hours of flying time that were needed for him to graduate. Weather also played a huge factor in his process of earning the required number of flying hours required for graduation. Andrew needed supportive services to help bridge the gap and to keep him focused on his class work, tests, studying, and flying time.

When it came close to the time for Andrew to graduate, Telamon was a big asset in providing him with serious pre-employment and job development activities. A good resume was crucial and Telamon worked extremely hard with Andrew to ensure that he had an outstanding resume as he was going to be applying for employment throughout the country. Along with his resume, another critical part of Andrew's job-readiness training that Telamon focused heavily on was mock interviews, both in-person and over the phone.

After many months of agonizing job search activities, Andrew finally landed a pilot job in the Northern Mariana Islands flying a multi-engine plane. His excitement could not be put into words. His journey had involved years of hard work, dedication, motivation, many disappointments, and struggles but Telamon was there for him through the ups and downs. United together, we made it happen.

Flying the friendly skies has now become a reality for Andrew, not just a dream!

## Alfonso Godinez

By Sara Lopez  
Workforce Development  
Specialist II, Montross



When Alfonso Godinez first walked into our Telamon Corporation office in Montross, he was seeking assistance with job search. He was a dependent of a farmworker and had a family size of four. He was unsure which employment path he wanted to jump into but knew he desperately wanted to start contributing income to his family.

Telamon staff assisted him with financial literacy and job readiness training. We also assisted him with educational and career assessments. After looking at his options, he decided that he wanted to pursue a career in welding. We called and set up an interview for him at a local trailer company where they hire welders.

Alfonso's interview went great and he was hired shortly after. We assisted him with the materials required to start working and he was ready to begin! He tells us that he is truly happy with his job, is making steady income, and is so glad to be contributing to his family. When staff recently spoke with his employer, they told us that Alfonso is a very hard worker and that he is doing an excellent job. We are so proud of you Alfonso! We wish you much continued success in the future!

## Housing Update

By Tytiana Dennis  
Housing Program  
Coordinator, Danville

### Lease Purchase

The lease purchase program gives low to moderate income families, who may be facing credit challenges, an opportunity to reside in a home before purchase. A percentage of monthly mortgage is used for down payment and closing cost toward home purchase. The clients work directly with our housing counselor to establish or repair credit. They also learn budgeting and home maintenance tips. We have 8 homes in the program: 4 of them should close by mid year and the rest next year.

### Foreclosure Prevention

- Mr. G. recently returned to his home after a few years away.

He had no income other than Social Security benefits and faced a mortgage payment he could not handle. Working with our counselor, he was able to obtain a loan modification that cut his monthly payment almost in half. Mr. G. is ecstatic he can now afford to stay in his home while he gets his life back on track.

- Mr. & Mrs. G were behind on their home loan and asked for assistance. Mr. G. had been out of work for 6 months. Mrs. G is on disability and her monthly income did not cover the monthly expenses. We worked with them to obtain a loan modification. The approval came last week and they called to thank us. They also told us Mr. G. got a new job and they feel much more secure.

## Staff Notes

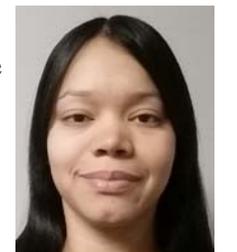
Our NFJP office in Harrisonburg has been completely revitalized.

**Magaly Quinones Guzman**, a former

Telamon employee, is now Workforce Development Specialist II.

**Isa Martell Bonet** joins us as Workforce Development Specialist I.

**Selyna Velez** came aboard part-time as Field Service Clerk.



We expanded the Housing office in Danville by hiring **Angela Harris** as Certified Housing Counselor.

## A Kind and Loving Caretaker

By Isa Martell Bonet  
Workforce Development  
Specialist I, Harrisonburg

Joan is a 34-year-old Hispanic woman who came from Puerto Rico with her family to search for a better quality of life in the United States. Joan had various barriers holding her back to reach her goals and dreams. Telamon helped her financially to take ESOL classes and to become a Certified Nurse



Assistant (CNA). Joan's success demonstrates that when you make a great effort, work hard, and have the desire, you can accomplish your goals. Becoming bilingual opened the doors for Joan to work

at Team Nurse, a nursing agency. Now, she is working for Team Nurse providing excellent care for the elderly. We talked with a staff member of Team Nurse and she told us, "Joan is very loved and appreciated by our clients; one of them does not want *anybody* else besides Joan to provide care to her." Joan informed us that the patient's family said they would do anything in their power to have Joan as an exclusive CNA for their mother. We are very proud of Joan's success and we wish her the best in her career.

# Virginia Weatherization Program

By Wendy McRae  
Weatherization Program  
Support Specialist, South Hill

As part of our Weatherization Program, we respond to requests from residents in our service area. Each case is unique and requires Telamon to understand both the client and their needs. We talk to the residents and then conduct a thorough inspection of the home before beginning work. We strive to correct weatherization deficiencies, educate the client, and provide excellent service. Two of our clients from this quarter agreed to share their experiences.

**Queenia Smith.** Ms. Smith lives in her home with three children and a nephew. Before receiving services from Telamon, they had had no heat at all for about one year. Where there should have been a heating system, we found an empty space with exposed ducts and insulation (picture below).



When our work was completed, they had a new, efficient heat pump installed (next picture). The entire family was very happy! Ms. Smith rated our team and their work *Excellent* in every category.



She said, “I highly recommend this team,” and that she would tell anyone who needed weatherization services to contact Telamon, “I can’t thank them enough.”

**Felicia Rainey.** Ms. Rainey also rated Telamon *Excellent* in every category on the client response questionnaire. She was so pleased with the way Telamon’s crew did their work, she wrote a long letter describing in detail how they identified weatherization problems in her home, talked to her about what they were going to do (picture below), and then com-



pleted each task in a highly professional manner. Based on the results of the energy audit, Telamon

had identified a number of problems and corrected each one, explaining everything to Ms. Rainey along the way.



Ms. Rainey’s Roof Before Weatherization.

Some of the tasks performed for Ms. Rainey included: installing plastic sheeting beneath the home, cleaning and sealing vents, installing vent covers and shingles on the roof (picture below), sealing drafts



around the front door, installing and sealing the back door, installing or replacing weather stripping, wrapping pipes, wrapping the water heater, and installing energy-efficient light bulbs. She said, “Telamon has a wonderful team... I am well pleased with their performance.”



# Special REPORT

By Chris Hicks

As many of you already know, Sharon will be retiring at the end of June after 35 years service to Telamon. Some of you have had the pleasure of working with Sharon during many of those years. I have only known her during the last five years. I was hired to be her Secretary and later became Administrative Assistant. I may not have known her as long, but from such a close vantage, I feel I know her well. Before Sharon leaves us to enjoy her well-earned retirement, I wanted to share with you all a small glimpse of this wonderful person I have grown to love and respect.

I first met Sharon when I interviewed as a Temp to fill a vacancy. She impressed me immediately. I've been on a lot of interviews, but that was the first time I felt like I was being seen and heard as a person, rather than just being evaluated as a potential asset. I had no doubt she would be weighing the merits of my credentials, yet I sensed a more personal, human connection and evaluation as well.

After several weeks, Sharon offered me full-time employment and I gratefully accepted. I had previously Temp'ed at a bank and an insurance company. Those were both jobs with good pay, yet neither place appealed to me. Telamon offered more. I knew this because I was starting to know Sharon. She was serious about the job and always worked energetically to get things accomplished. She was sincere about the mission: improving lives by providing opportunities. She was direct, honest, accountable, responsible, respectful, and respectable. She said, "Chris, would you like to come and work for us?" I thought about it for a few seconds and replied, "Yes. Yes, I would. This is a good place to work. I feel comfortable here."

As months, and then years, rolled by, I never regretted my decision. I remember numerous times in the middle of a busy work day when I would walk in Sharon's office, quietly stand near her desk, and say, "I'm lucky to be here."

Each year we worked together, I learned more about the job, more about Telamon, and more about Sharon as a leader and as a person. Those of you who know her no doubt recognize what a unique person she is. She seems to have grown into her role as State Director over many years of direct experience, learning how to conduct business without sacrificing her innate compassion.

In my previous jobs, I was always told that a nice person couldn't be the boss because people would just walk all over them. While working for Sharon, I saw a few cases where other people must have believed that same adage. They met Sharon and recognized her as a genuinely caring person, and then they tried to take advantage of her. What a surprise when they discovered something I like to call "Sharon steel." Underneath her lovely exterior, Sharon possesses a core strength, a quiet certainty, which protects her from harm. I don't know her secret. I suspect she's not even aware of it herself, but I've seen Sharon's inner armor shine forth and deflect would-be attackers and miscreants. Through hardship, Sharon prevails with grace, without losing her essential self, without turning mean or petty.

We will all be sad to see Sharon leave. I asked the Virginia staff if they had any parting words or thoughts they'd like me to include in the newsletter. The response was clear, "Sharon, you've worked hard and you have earned a wonderful retirement many times over. We all hope you will make time to relax and enjoy yourself. You deserve the best. We love you and we will miss you."