

GOOD NEWS

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CHANGING LIVES THROUGH THE POWER OF WORK

THE JOB MARKET IS STILL A CHALLENGE FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Unemployment in Virginia is at a statistical low not seen in nearly a decade, and the Virginia Employment Commission reported at the end of 2017 that fewer than three candidates exist for every job opening in the Fredericksburg region.

But those numbers don't tell the story of the specific difficulties individuals with disabilities face as they navigate the job market—a problem that goes straight to the core of Rappahannock Goodwill Industries' (RGI) mission.

"Yes, the job market is improving, and that's a good thing, but the folks who walk through our doors have significant barriers to employment," said Megan Bergen, RGI's Vice President for Mission Services and Chief Mission Officer.

These aren't the kinds of issues that lend themselves to one-size-fits-all solutions. That's why Bergen says the person-centered approach that RGI delivers through its programs for job seekers is so crucial to success. Teaching people to advocate for themselves, offering work experience through employment at RGI, and helping employers overcome misconceptions that can cause them to overlook these individuals are just a few of the ways RGI helps connect people with disabilities with meaningful work.

In 2015, the most recent year for which data is available, nearly 35 percent of 18 to 64 year olds with disabilities living in America were employed, compared with 76 percent of people in that demographic without disabilities. "It's still a very unbalanced playing field," Bergen said. "We want to change that statistic and help people with disabilities enjoy the power of work."

RGI has developed training sessions that can help employers get past common misconceptions, such as the idea that hiring individuals with disabilities leads to higher costs for workman's compensation or health insurance. "None of that is true, and that's part of what our training emphasizes," Bergen said.

RGI can also help connect employers with resources that

create incentives for hiring individuals with disabilities, such as training stipends and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit.

In the end, said Bergen, "It's about finding the right job match where employees can be successful and really benefit the bottom line of the employer." RGI's individualized approach to connecting people with rewarding work can help combat the factors that create a tougher job market for individuals with disabilities, one successful employee at a time. To find your next successful employee, contact Rappahannock Goodwill. ■



DONNIE'S COLUMN**IN TODAY'S LABOR MARKET, IT'S CRUCIAL TO EXPECT MORE**

By Donnie Tolson, President & CEO

Expect more.

The optimism inherent in those two words has been a guiding principle for Rappahannock Goodwill Industries since it was started in 1966 by a group of concerned parents.

Those parents expected more for their adult children with disabilities.

Shortly after they launched what would become Rappahannock Goodwill Industries, this country began to expect more as well, and to dream of fuller lives for individuals with disabilities.

From the 1970s through the 1990s, court cases, legislation, and growing public awareness helped create more opportunities for individuals with disabilities to build lives within their communities, pursue vocational interests, and have greater access to important public services.

At Rappahannock Goodwill, we have expanded our services to help people with all kinds of barriers to employment. But people with disabilities are near and dear to our hearts. Despite all the progress made in the past couple of decades, individuals with disabilities still face significant barriers that can keep them out of the working world. We continue to seek new ways to remove those barriers.

As an employer ourselves, we've seen first-hand the power of raising expectations for these individuals, believing they are capable of new skills and meaningful work, and helping them achieve their vocational goals.

We now want to share our experience with other employers. We want to work with them to help create programs that offer an incentive to take a chance, to expect more, so that their eyes can be opened to the contributions these individuals can make to their businesses.

By raising expectations, we can create opportunities for job seekers and employers alike.

If you would like to find out how your business can partner with Goodwill, send me an email at donnie.tolson@FredGoodwill.org. ■

**JEANS FOR JOBS: KEEP GOODWILL IN MIND**

By Ted Smith, Senior Vice President & Chief Operations Officer



In my job as Chief Operations Officer for Rappahannock Goodwill Industries (RGI), I see jobs where you see jeans.

When you look around your home and see clutter like worn out jeans, we want you to see an opportunity. When you donate gently used clothing, household items, computers, or automobiles, we see hope for people who have barriers to employment.

It all starts when you pack up those things that you no longer need or use and bring them to one of more than two dozen donation centers throughout the Fredericksburg region. A friendly donation center attendant will help you unload those items and give you a receipt for your donation. Our donation center and store employees are among the several hundred people RGI employs directly through our stores, commercial laundry, contracting services, and general administration.

Particularly in our stores, the entire donation and sales process—from our donation center, to sorting and pricing, and finally to the sales floor—is a job creator. These jobs build skills such as forklift driving, cash register operation, and customer relations. In turn, gaining these skills can help our employees transition to employment outside RGI.

Make Goodwill a regular part of your household maintenance routine.

In addition to decluttering your home and keeping items out of our landfills, you'll be helping people in the Fredericksburg region find meaningful work. ■



RGI OFFERS A SPECTRUM OF SERVICES TO JOB SEEKERS

Rappahannock Goodwill Industries (RGI) offers a comprehensive set of services designed to help anyone with a barrier to employment find a path to meaningful work.

What makes RGI’s approach unique is its understanding that each of the roughly 10,000 individuals looking for work who walks through its doors each year comes with a different background, set of barriers, and list of dreams for the future.

The work to overcome those barriers often starts at one of RGI’s Job Help Centers within the community. These centers are free and open to the public. Visitors can access computers and job postings, as well as basic training in computer skills, interviewing, and other job search skills. Each Job Help Center is staffed by an employment specialist.

“The employment specialists work with each individual separately,” said Megan Bergen, RGI Vice President for Mission Services and Chief Mission Officer. “They are trained to help people mitigate their various barriers to employment, and to help them access other services in the community if necessary.”

Bergen said Goodwill’s person-centered approach is key. By getting to know individual job seekers, employment

specialists can help them identify skills they didn’t know were marketable, or get them to open up about their barriers and formulate a strategy to overcome them.

On the other end of RGI’s continuum of services to job seekers are its more intensive, fee-based services for people who have significant disabilities and need constant supervision and help maintaining their health and safety.

Wherever a client’s needs lie on RGI’s spectrum of services, Bergen said, the approach is the same. “It’s a very deliberate, intentional movement toward an employment goal,” she said. ■



A RESOURCE FOR EMPLOYERS

Rappahannock Goodwill Industries (RGI) has been a critical resource for job seekers for more than 50 years. Now, RGI is embarking on a concerted effort to become a resource for employers.

“We really want to make the connection between the employer and the job seeker,” said RGI President & CEO Donnie Tolson.

Job fairs are one way RGI has connected area employers with the more than 10,000 people who seek its services annually. In 2017, RGI hosted 33 job fairs on its various sites. These fairs brought out more than 625 job seekers, resulting in more than 197 hires for employers including Lidl, O’Reilly’s Auto Parts, Belk, VDOT, and others.

RGI can work closely with employers to understand their requirements and qualifications. In this way, applicants can be screened and only reasonable candidates sent for them to review.

33 Job Fairs
625 Job Seekers
197 Hires

For more immediate needs, RGI’s Taskforce Staffing can provide staffing for short- and long-term temporary placements, temp-to-hire placements, direct hire placements, and customized payroll options.

Donnie Tolson said connecting with employers is a major priority for RGI over the next several years. His goal is to find employers who want to work closely with Goodwill, to better understand each employer’s needs, and potentially even to develop a curriculum that can lead to a more consistent supply of good candidates.

“We already create a pipeline of employees for some area businesses. We want to have a greater impact and work with more businesses,” he said.

If you would like to find out how Goodwill can help with job recruitment, training, and onboarding, email info@FredGoodwill.org. ■