

2005 New Freedom Award Recipient: Imperial Plaza

In the close-knit community of Bellevue in Richmond, VA sits **Imperial Plaza** -- a place where people know their neighbors and is considered the "residence of choice" among local seniors seeking independent or assisted-living apartments. A true community partner, this universally accessible retirement facility has not only served as a favorable residential home over the years, it has also proven to be a stellar employer.

Through business outreach programs such as the Metro Richmond Workforce Network, Imperial Plaza was able to meet its recruitment needs by tapping into under-utilized labor pools including workers with disabilities. Julie Jones, Imperial Plaza's Human Resource Coordinator, used the Workforce Network as a means to share job leads across various employment-driven agencies including the Department of Rehabilitative Services, who represent job-ready candidates with disabilities. Imperial Plaza offered to host two of the Network's monthly meetings, giving agency representatives the opportunity to meet and interact with significant hiring managers from Imperial Plaza. This led to employment outcomes across all facets of the facility, including positions in assisted living, food service, housekeeping, and grounds.

"Imperial Plaza has been extremely receptive to taking a look at our candidates and finding reasons to screen 'in' rather than to screen 'out,'" says Ethel Walker, Business Development Manager of the Department of Rehabilitative Services and creator of the Workforce Network model. "The environment at Imperial Plaza is warm and supportive. It is a place where disability is not an issue."

With the ultimate goal of successful employment, Imperial Plaza has served as a hiring site for other under-utilized, untapped populations such as mature workers, Refugee & Immigration workers, and the Hispanic community. In addition, this facility has served as a training site for the PAVE Program (Program for Adults in Vocational Education) Food Service Classes, which give students the opportunity to work side by side with food service members. Imperial Plaza has also provided an internship program for students in the Food Service and Health Care Companion Programs, allowing completion of 200 hours of on-the-job training to gain real work experience. The workforce development professionals, employees and participants have commented positively on the availability of staff, ongoing communication, and natural supports.

"It is evident that Imperial Plaza cares about its employees and goes the extra mile to ensure a happy work environment," said Jim Rothrock, Commissioner for the Department of Rehabilitative Services. "The manner in which they support their staff and serve their community sets the standard on how Virginia's businesses should operate."