



For Media Use:
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Communications Office
News Release

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Training Program Helps People with Disabilities Learn Hospitality Trade

JACKSONVILLE – People with disabilities in the Jacksonville area have a new opportunity when it comes to training for future careers in the hospitality industry. It’s called Hands On @ Hyatt, and it’s already proving to be a success. The program is up and running in eight hotels in Florida, as well as in six states. The director and founder of the program, John Ficca, is thrilled about the newest addition. “We are very excited about expanding our program to Jacksonville. We could not provide this alternative training without the support of our business partners at Hyatt and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR).”

Four students graduated from the program in October. They each chose different areas of specialization, including culinary, housekeeping, PBX operator, and bellman. Recent graduate, Marvin Wiltshire, knows the program will help him realize his career goals. “I think future employers will at least talk to me now,” he says. “Before, they wouldn’t have even looked at me. The training is going to help me get a job in something I want to do.”

Marvin aspires to be a chef. He worked in the kitchen at Hyatt learning basic cooking skills. Hyatt Executive Chef Scott Brittingham knows the program has set Marvin up to find employment. “Marvin trained side-by-side with our chefs on knife skills, salad making, loading cheese trays, and more,” he says. “He would be a good production prep person. I feel he would fall into that role easily.”

VR, the state agency funding the training program, helps people with disabilities find and maintain employment. Marvin’s VR Counselor, Diane Jardine, is pleased with how Hands On is helping prepare her customers to find jobs. “Marvin came to VR very down, but the program let him gain real-world work experience,” she says. “This program has created a spark of hope in him and improved his employability in a kitchen setting.”

Charisse Jordan is another successful graduate of Hands On. After completing her two weeks of training at Hyatt, managers extended her an offer to continue training for an additional two weeks. At that time, her housekeeping skills were at a level Hyatt couldn’t pass up and so they hired her permanently. Hyatt’s Executive Housekeeper, Henry Rhoden, knew Charisse would be an asset to any top-rate hotel when she came through the program. “If everyone was like Charisse, everyone would be

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employing top-notch associates,” he says. “She came to us with a great attitude, contagious smile, impeccable work ethic, and was just a ray of sunshine.”

Hyatt in Jacksonville plans to continue participating in Hands On. They are committed to diversity in the workplace and are excited to have the opportunity to work with people with disabilities.

For information on how to sign up for the program, log on to www.handsoneducation.net. Florida’s Vocational Rehabilitation program is committed to helping people with disabilities become part of America’s workforce. Our employer-focused website, **FLJobConnections.com**, allows businesses to search at no charge for employees who are ready to go to work, as well as to post available jobs. VR has 80 offices across Florida, and last year helped 6,071 Floridians with significant disabilities find or keep a job. For more information about VR and its services, call (800) 451-4327 or visit **Rehabworks.org**.

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REMINDER FOR MEDIA--When reporting on stories about people with disabilities, remember to use language that puts the person first, rather than the disability. For example, use phrases such as "people with disabilities" (instead of "the disabled") and "person who uses a wheelchair" (rather than "wheelchair bound"); and “people with a mental illness” (rather than “the mentally ill”).