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Communications Office  
**News Release**

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**People with Disabilities Find Great Employment Opportunities at Sirata Beach Resort & Conference Center**

**ST PETERSBURG, FL** – At first glance, **Chiquita Ivory** is like many adults, although some would say she’s friendlier than most. She’s driven to succeed by her strong work ethic and commitment to hustling until the job is done. “Having a job, it’s like you won a million bucks,” Chiquita says. What you may not realize when you meet her is that she has a disability.

**Katina Karagiannakis** works at Vincent House, a recovery through work program that helps adults like Chiquita, who are diagnosed with severe and persistent mental illnesses, to reenter the workforce. Katina often partners with **Sirata Beach Resort and Conference Center** to find her customers fulfilling jobs. “Sirata Beach Resort is a true leader in the employment of people with disabilities,” Katina says. “They offer competitive employment in a high profile, integrated setting.”

Being part of a business like Sirata that employs those with and without disabilities is exactly what appeals to Chiquita about her job. “I feel like I am part of a team, because our work at Sirata is a team effort,” she says. “Working there makes me feel proud of myself and lets me know that I have accomplished a lot.”

That’s what co-owner Gregg Nicklaus was looking for when he and his siblings, who run Sirata as a team, began their partnership with Vincent House. “We don’t typically differentiate between ‘able’ and ‘disabled;’ it’s about doing your job well and having pride in what you do,” Gregg says. “The group from Vincent House exceeds our expectations and that of our guests.”

His sister’s views on the subject mirror Gregg’s. “I feel like they give us more than we give them,” Deborah Nicklaus says. “We have found people with disabilities are hardworking and conscientious. They are also always appreciative.”

Vincent House customers who work at Sirata get the opportunity to perform a number of jobs. Some work in the pool hut area, gift shop, and restaurants, while others, like **Michael Taddeo**, work as part of the grounds and maintenance crew. “Working at the Sirata Beach Resort is a chance for me to be out and about,” Michael says. “Being around different hotel guests everyday helps me overcome my social anxiety.”

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Sirata is grateful to have dependable employees who help accomplish necessary upkeep at the resort. “Their work ethic, attitude and contribution to the team effort is solid,” Gregg says. “They fit the mold for a perfect staff person.” The jobs also provide much needed fulfillment for employees. “Having a job means I am part of society,” Michael says. “Being able to work alongside people who don’t have disabilities helps me feel part of a real team.”

Sirata Beach Resort & Conference Center of Florida is one of seven businesses being honored as a statewide recipient of the Florida Exceptional Employer Award on Thursday, October 18, at Tallahassee City Hall.

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”).