

Building *for the* Future

Engaging Business. Empowering Youth.



News from the Marriott Foundation's Atlanta Bridges Program Summer 2012

YOUTH SPOTLIGHT



Eric Adams and Crystal Lowe

When Eric Adams was a senior at Pebblebrook High School, he was eager to get a job. After applying on his own at Kmart and Kroger and not getting hired, Eric's self esteem started to wane. "I didn't know what to do. I thought about going to college, even joining the military, but I knew that I had to find a job quickly," recalled Eric.

Eric was referred to Bridges and was assigned to Employer Representative Brandy McCrary. "Ms. Brandy started taking me out to look for jobs and helping me with completing job applications." says Eric. "She even took me to my interviews."

While job developing for Bridges students, Ms. McCrary met with Crystal Lowe, Guest Services Supervisor of the Georgia Dome, and told her about Eric and what a great fit he would be for customer service. After a few weeks, Eric was called for an interview for the Guest Services Specialist position and was hired. When asked to describe how Eric has been an asset to the Georgia Dome, Ms. Lowe replied, "He is always smiling and making other people happy; he is an integral part of what we do here."

Eric has been in his position as Guest Services Specialist for the last two years, where he acts as a "lifeguard," assisting Georgia Dome patrons with directions, disability services and anything that involves direct customer service. His current performance approval rating is 4.7 out of 5.0 and Eric continues to shape relationships with his co-workers as well as with management.

"Eric is a great employee! He always comes to work positive and ready to work—and is an essential member of our customer service team" says Ms. Lowe.

To add to his list of achievements, Eric was accepted into the United States Air Force Reserve and is classified as an Airman E-2. In his current role as a vehicle operator, Eric has the important job of transporting four-star generals and multi-million dollar aircraft from base to base. He is looking forward to achieving another goal: attending school at Le Cordon Bleu to become a master chef. ☞

LOCAL HOTELS INTRODUCE BRIDGES YOUTH TO HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

Bridges would like to thank the following hotels for offering work place learning experiences to youth in the second semester of 2012: Airport Marriott; Renaissance Concourse; Marriott Airport Gateway; Ritz-Carlton Buckhead; and Renaissance Waverly. ☞

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BRIDGES STAFF PROFILE



Senior Employer Representative Susie Stockton joined the Marriott Foundation in October 2003 when Bridges expanded to Cobb County Schools. She transferred to Atlanta from Knoxville, TN, where since 2000 she had worked as a Human Resources Manager at Marriott’s Shared Services Center, an accounting processing center for Marriott properties around the country. An Atlanta native and graduate of Brookwood High School in Snellville, Susie wanted to return to her hometown to be closer to family.

Before joining Marriott, Susie worked five years as a branch manager for Randstad Staffing Services, where she developed many of the skills that have served her well as a Bridges employer representative, including building relationships with businesses, marketing potential youth to hiring managers, and ensuring mutually satisfactory job placements for Bridges youth and the companies that hire them.

During her nearly nine years with Bridges, Susie has been assigned to the same two Cobb County high schools, Campbell and South Cobb, where she has served nearly 200 youth, 150 of whom she has placed in jobs. Susie attributes her success with Bridges to perseverance, follow through, and strong organizational skills. For Susie the most gratifying aspect of the Employer Representative role is seeing a motivated young person land a good job, especially in this troubled economy when youth and adults alike are struggling to find employment. Susie has a knack for working with young people, and at one point wanted to become a public school teacher, until her father encouraged her to pursue studies in business. Heeding his advice, Susie enrolled at Georgia Southern University and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in business administration.

Susie lives in McDonough with husband (Eric), two daughters (Leah & Anna), two sons (Will & Jake), and one Granddaughter (Jocelyn). When she has free time (which is not often with a family that size), Susie enjoys a dinner-movie date with her husband. She also enjoys gardening, cooking, and spoiling her dogs, Lindsay and Flower, both Shih Tzus. ∞

PREPARING YOUTH FOR THE WORK FORCE—by Allen Brown

I recently delivered a Bridges presentation to a large group of business leaders at an airport concessionaries’ meeting. Afterward, one local employer approached me and said he would rather hire 40- or 50-year-olds because young adults coming out of high school and college lack a basic work ethic. This came as no surprise, and I often point to such sentiments when making the case for programs such as Bridges.

Is this simply another instance of the “older generation” casting aspersions on their younger counterparts? Not according to a 2006 study by the Conference Board, which concluded that “the future workforce is here, and it is ill-prepared.” The study surveyed 431 human resources professionals, and

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“70 percent cited deficiencies among incoming high school graduates in applied skills, such as professionalism . . . personal accountability and effective work habits.”

While every generation shakes its head in dismay at the one that follows it, I think those of us who comprise the “older generation” might have more reason to feel this way than did our parents. Rapid advancements in technology are having profound effects on society, from the way we socialize, to how we shop, bank, share information, learn, work and entertain ourselves. The Internet, and the ubiquity of portable devices such as smartphones, laptops, and tablets, have fundamentally altered the way we function. It’s hard to instill in youth the value of delayed gratification when with the click of a mouse or the touch of a screen they can get anything they want. Anything, that is, except jobs.

“Employment rates for youth aged 16-19 for the last several summers have been lower than in any time since World War II.”

Yes, youth in this country are having little luck finding employment. According to reports from the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University, employment rates for youth aged 16-19 for the last several summers have been lower than in any time since World War II. In May 2012 the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported an employment rate of 25.9 percent for youth aged 16-19. For youth with disabilities, the employment rate was drastically lower, at 10.5 percent.

So what does all of this mean? Well it means of course that programs such as Bridges are needed more than ever. It also means that the workforce has changed dramatically since I was in high school, a time when many of my friends had part-time jobs at a mall, a movie theatre, a grocery store, or restaurant. Some of my classmates in DECA spent half their day in school and the other half in a paid job that earned them academic credit. In the last decade our public education system has emphasized academic achievement and college preparation over practical, applied vocational skills. While everyone can agree that we need high academic standards, we shouldn’t lose sight of those youth who are not college bound—and our obligations as adults to prepare them for entry into the work force.

Although jobs today are more complex than ever, most entry-level employment can be mastered with on-the-job training. Employers often say they can train how to do the jobs, especially when employees come with solid soft skills, such as reliability, integrity, respect for authority, and a positive attitude. And while some might criticize such entry-level jobs as dead end, many people would argue that jobs in retail, food service, and warehouses have ample opportunity for advancement for those who are committed and hard-working. We all patronize businesses that employ entry-level workers, and we all delight in our interactions with them when they are service oriented, efficient, friendly and well trained—and when they approach their work as polished professionals instead of menial laborers. Maybe the first step in preparing youth to enter the workforce should begin with the message we send to them about the value such jobs have in society. Maybe we should begin by telling youth that all work is noble if it’s honest and if you do your best—no matter how “entry-level” it may seem. ☞

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