

## Putting Delawareans Back to Work

### DELAWAREANS BECOME OCCUPATIONALLY MOBILE THROUGH FORWARD DELAWARE

BY BILL POTTER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DELAWARE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

» Last summer, Governor John Carney signed Executive Order #43, creating the Rapid Workforce Training and Redeployment Initiative to assist the thousands of Delaware workers and their families who lost jobs and income due to the COVID-19 crisis. The initiative directed \$10 million of CARES Act funds towards the creation of a workforce retraining program called Forward Delaware. Stood up by the Delaware Department of Labor and the Delaware Workforce Development Board, Forward Delaware trained roughly 2,400 COVID-affected workers with occupational skills to place them back in the workforce in high-demand industries.

For many Delawareans, Forward Delaware allowed them to continue putting food on the table for their families while receiving training. For many others, it placed them on a trajectory towards a higher-paying career path. Here are a few success stories:

#### DECK HAND BECOMES MEDICAL ASSISTANT

When Alicen Sharpe-Rhodes was about 17, she stepped on the deck of her first fishing charter boat. For the next 30 years, she helped tourists bait hooks, clean fish, and otherwise keep the boat in ship shape.

Although Sharpe-Rhodes loved her job, she was laid off when pandemic-related health restrictions made it impossible for her charter boat to continue. At age 47, she returned to land and began looking for a new course.

She found one.



*Alicen Sharpe-Rhodes at Clinic by the Sea in Lewes.*

Through Forward Delaware, Sharp-Rhodes enrolled in the nursing assistant program at Delaware Technical Community College's Georgetown Campus where she traded in her fishing gear for surgical scrubs.

"It worked out very well," she said. "Everyone at Delaware Tech went out of their way to help. It was challenging."

One challenge she did not have was finding a job. The demand is high in Delaware's medical field. "I think everyone in my class found full-time employment," said Sharpe-Rhodes.

After graduating from the program, the newly minted medical assistant started her new career at Clinic-by-the-Sea in Lewes.

#### TRUCK DRIVER UPSKILLS

Every week, Mike Price of Newark laced up his work boots, climbed into the cab of a 28-foot truck and began his long ride to places like North Carolina or upstate New York.

Although the warehouse remained open, Price was laid off at the beginning of the pandemic. With time on his hands and a desire to keep driving, he began researching truck driving schools so he could obtain his Commercial Driver's License.

It was then Price discovered the ADTA who was accepting applications for school from funds received by Forward Delaware. After registering and completing the program, Price is back on the road and looking toward the future.

"I make the same run I did before, but now I am two and a half times the wage," he reflected. "I'm now able to save towards buying a house."

#### ENTREPRENEUR TURNED TRUCK DRIVER

Matt Wolynetz owns a party store. Maybe you've seen it on South Dupont Highway in New Castle. Pink, yellow, and green palm trees in the parking lot of a store with a bright yellow awning – PartyDelaware.com. It looks like a lot of fun, until a pandemic strikes and you can't have parties.

Luckily, Wolynetz obtained a CDL-A license issued by the State of Delaware so he could drive the big rigs and feed his family until events recommenced. Forward Delaware allowed him to earn the license through a contract between the State and the American Driving Training Academy



*Matt Wolynetz stands with his Dot Foods truck.*

(ADTA), which trains people to become commercial drivers.

After completing the program, Wolynetz began working for Dot Foods. "I was underemployed, but now I am earning a decent wage and putting some money away," he said. "The need (for drivers) is so great."

#### FROM OFFICE MANAGER TO MEDICAL ASSISTANT

Teresa Massingill spent most of her working life as a social media or office manager, dating all the way back to the days of AOL. However, she always had a different career path in her mind.

"I was always interested in the medical profession," she explained.

By chance Massingill heard a radio advertisement

promoting Polytech Adult Education. That moment was the beginning of a new journey.

Massingill enrolled in Polytech Adult Education's medical assisting program as part of Forward Delaware. She worked with their career services office where she found an opportunity at Urology Associates of Delaware. She was hired

on the spot during her interview even while still enrolled in the program.

"It wasn't just opportunity that I found at Polytech. I met people who were invested in trying to help me obtain my goals," remarked Massingill.



*Teresa Massingill is now a medical assistant at Urology Associates of Delaware.*

## DSCC Receives National Honors

In April, the State Chamber won eight awards in the Delaware Press Association's 2021 Communications Contest, including four first place awards that were entered into the National Federation of Press Women's National Communications Contest.

The results were released in June with the State Chamber receiving a first, second, and two honorable mention awards.

"2020 was an incredibly busy year for us," said vice president of strategic communications, Kelly Basile. "The staff remained diligent in never halting the delivery of timely information, important resources, and continued networking opportunities for Delaware's business community. We never stopped working on behalf of our members."

#### State Results:

1st: Marketing Campaign – *2020 Superstars in Business*

1st: Editing Newsletter – *Putting Delawareans Back to Work: Economic Recovery in the First State*

1st: Graphics/Design Publication – *COVID-19 Prevention Best Practices Guide*

1st: Digital Newsletter – *The Weekly Report*

2nd: Editing, Print/Online Publication – *September/October 2020 Delaware Business Magazine*

#### National Results:

1st: Marketing Campaign – *2020 Superstars in Business*

2nd: Editing Newsletter – *Putting Delawareans Back to Work: Economic Recovery in the First State*