



Manassas Nonprofit Enriches the Lives of People with Disabilities

Submitted by Erika Spalding

For more than half a century, Didlake, a Manassas-based nonprofit and the 2020 Manassas Business of the Year, has connected people with disabilities to employment, education and opportunities throughout the National Capital Region.

Didlake expanded over the years, most recently with the opening of two The UPS Stores and Didlake Document Imaging. But, much like Manassas has held onto its historical heritage and small-town charm, Didlake has never lost sight of its humble beginnings and founders' mission to increase access and opportunity for people with disabilities. Established in 1965 as a school, Didlake has been connecting people with disabilities with jobs since the mid-1970s.

"Didlake has a long history of enriching the lives of people with disabilities in Manassas and surrounding areas. In doing so, we've developed strong business connections, and have led many people and companies to recognize the benefits of having a disability-inclusive culture," said Didlake CEO Donna Hollis.

Today, Didlake employs 1,400 people, more than 80 percent of whom have disabilities, at its Manassas headquarters and 36 contract sites throughout the Baltimore-Washington and Hampton Roads, Va. areas.

Additionally, Didlake's Employment Services Program supports more than 900 people with disabilities who work in community jobs at businesses ranging from grocery stores to law firms. The recent employment journey of one such individual – Trey – exemplifies how this program works. Like most program participants, Trey was referred to Didlake

by the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). An employment specialist worked with Trey to assess his interests and skills, matched him with a job at the Hampton Inn Manassas and worked with both parties for job development, training, and following-along support.

"I have a good time at work and I like to get paid so I can save up for clothes, food, shoes..." said Trey, who performs a variety of custodial tasks, towel folding, and special projects for Hampton Inn Manassas.

Jennifer Decker, General Manager of the hotel, said, "He is definitely a hard worker... He makes everyone laugh. He comes in with a smile. He has filled our needs." Regarding Employment Services, Decker said, "The process is easy and to have that constant communication back and forth to make sure it is working, is great. Other businesses should try this."



For individuals who aren't interested in or ready for employment, Didlake's five Day Support Programs provide opportunities to improve independent living skills and engage with the community. The program is customized by individual, but may include shopping, going to the gym, or taking cooking classes. Volunteering is a major component – for community integration as well as building vocational skills. Over the years, Didlake has volunteered for over 20 local nonprofits. In FY2020, more than 85 percent of participants volunteered for a collective total of 25,447 hours.

To support Didlake's mission, visit The UPS Stores in Center at Innovation in Manassas and Stonebridge in Woodbridge, Va., and consider going paperless with Didlake Document Imaging. Visit www.didlake.org to explore other opportunities to partner with Didlake.



February 19th is National Caregivers Day

Providers Association for Home Health & Hospice Agencies (PAHHHA) founded National Caregivers Day in 2015 to honor the health care professionals across the country providing long-term and hospice care. According to National Day Calendar here are some ways to show your appreciation: give them a card of thanks, let them know with a kind word of encouragement, tell their supervisor how much you appreciate their services, and employers can provide a special appreciation luncheon.

<https://nationaldaycalendar.com/national-caregivers-day-third-friday-in-february>