

PRESS RELEASE
For Immediate Release

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October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month *Job Candidates from Mill Neck Services Provide Quality Service in the Workforce*

Work is fundamental to our lives. It means so much more than a paycheck – it offers purpose and the opportunity to lead an independent, self-directed life for all people, including people with disabilities. But the rate of unemployment for people with disabilities is still vastly higher than the general population.

Mill Neck Services (MNS), part of the Mill Neck Family of Organization located on Long Island, helps people with a disability find employment, and then ensures that their job transition is a smooth one. Mill Neck Services created the Job Development Program in 1986 for this purpose, and continues to reach out to employers to share with them the values of hiring people with a disability.

“We all have social responsibility to help our fellow man, but there is a little trepidation among some employers to hire people with disabilities,” said Christine Oddo, Associate Director at MNS. “Some employers are bias-free and hire people on the basis of their ability, not disability. They show the people that we send to them respect and give value to the individuals they employ.”

The Job Development Program, now “Employment Services,” has grown tremendously over the years, and now serves not only all of Long Island, but also the five boroughs of New York City. Many people with a disability, like Joe D’Amico, have benefited.

D’Amico, a Mill Neck Manor School graduate, began working in 1995 at Fluid Metering, Inc., a Syosset-based company that manufactures metering pumps and dispensers, the majority of which are used for medical purposes. He is hard of hearing, but that did not stop him from quickly moving up through the ranks at Fluid Metering.

“It’s a good idea for people who are Deaf to go out and get a job,” D’Amico said. “It makes you feel good about yourself.”

Fluid Metering owner Hank Pinkerton said as long as someone is willing to work he’ll hire them. “Joe is part of the family of what we do here and is one of the more valuable employees,” Pinkerton said.

This is due to MNM’s Employment Services. After acquiring the job interview for D’Amico, MNS followed up. When he landed the job, MNS provided training and orientation and continued to assist him at the place of employment.

“Joe had an Employment Specialist [provided by MNS] that advocated for him to advance,” Oddo said. “His extended coach filled him in on the bigger picture — the why. She clarified for him how his job related to the organization.”

Marta Reeger is the Coordinator of Employment Services and has been at MNS for the past 14 years. “A disability is only a disability in relationship to a given task. We monitor and reinforce skills as needed. We explain why they are doing what they are doing and if a change happens, why,” Reeger said.

D'Amico, who started out as a shipping clerk, is now in quality service. His contribution is critical, since he is the last person to inspect the pumps, some of which are used for dialysis machines, before they are sent out to customers.

“They told me if I could bring more people in like Joe they'd hire 20 of them, which is a tremendous compliment,” said Oddo.

People who are Deaf or hard of hearing excel at jobs where a great deal of visual concentration is required. In fact, D'Amico's heightened visual perception led him to uncover a problem at Fluid Metering that perplexed others.

“There was an issue with the parts that no one could figure out,” Oddo said. “They thought it was a staff issue, but Joe figured out that it was the metal that was flawed and he was right.”

Pinkerton is quick to explain one of the reasons why Joe has worked out so well. “He is so focused and does not get distracted by the things that are going on around him,” Pinkerton said. “He's really reliable and a great employee.”

Fluid Metering manager Said Mezrahi also said D'Amico is a great employee. “Every person has a job and skill he can do and there is no disability here, just ability,” Mezrahi said. “From the beginning I found Joe to be intelligent and that I could train him, even with communication problems.”

Mezrahi said when he first met D'Amico he learned some sign language, but soon realized it wasn't necessary. “We developed our own system to understand each other,” he explained. “He is a hard worker, caring, responsible and honest. It is hard to get people like him.”

MNS sends Employment Specialists to ensure the success of those they've employed, assisting with any communication or training issues. Kim Clauss, an Employment Specialist for over ten years, works with D'Amico. Her job is to problem solve, be present for the initial training and then visit on a regular basis. In D'Amico's case, she's helped with the technical communication training and more. For instance, even though D'Amico can communicate with his co-workers, a couple of months ago he had to have the Health Care Act explained to him.

The specialist is more than an interpreter because there is a connection formed with both the business and the employee and the relationship is long term. “After Kim explains what the manager said, she will then sit down with Joe and make sure he understands it,” Oddo said. “She supports him to make sure he is successful.”

Clauss immediately recognized qualities in D'Amico that she believes are very positive. “What I like about working with Joe is that he's willing to listen and learn, even though he's been here 19 years,” Kim said, adding that he is always working toward new goals. “He had wanted to be a leader and now he has leadership responsibilities here.”

Mezrahi said the work D'Amico performs is challenging. “In the beginning he was uncomfortable and isolated himself,” Mezrahi recalled. “We built a trust between us. When he was right I supported him, and when he was wrong I explained the issue to him.” Additionally, Mezrahi has seen D'Amico grow. “He wasn't good at math at first, but now he is very good at it,” he added.

D'Amico said he's very happy working at Fluid Metering. “I like everything I do here and am very motivated to come in every day,” he said. “Sometimes it is hard, because the others don't sign, but everyone has improved in communicating with me. They don't know sign but we make up our own language to be able to communicate.”

He has friends at the job and someone to sit with during the lunchtime break. D'Amico said he couldn't be happier and plans to stay at Fluid Metering until he is old enough to retire.

Photo courtesy of Mill Neck Services



Photo caption: Mill Neck Manor graduate Joe D'Amico checked to be sure the wires were lined up and all of the parts were included in the pumps at Fluid Metering, where he's been working for the past 19 years.



Photo Caption: Kim Clauss, a job coach, signs to Joe D'Amico at his job to explain information he'll need to be effective.