

PRESS RELEASE

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Mill Neck Services Continues to Find Jobs for People with Disabilities

Ken Longstreet is not deaf, but he has always been hard of hearing, so much so that he has a disability. He spent much of his younger years working as a house painter or as a landscaper, but he always knew he'd have to find less physically demanding work as he aged. Yet, with a disability he couldn't compete for employment without help.

Over 20 years ago, Longstreet went to Mill Neck Services (MNS) for assistance with finding a job. He landed the job of his dreams – working for the National Weather Service. Now retired, he volunteers at Mill Neck Manor. “Part of my reason for volunteering at Mill Neck is to thank them for helping me,” Longstreet said.

Working in the office services unit at the Weather Service, Longstreet maintained the copy machines, ordered supplies, handled the mail, and, considered a valuable employee, was given opportunities to work on special projects. The reason for his retirement – as technology advanced there was little need for his position.

These days there are many people competing for jobs. MNS is committed to ensuring people who are deaf and/or disabled are considered. They provide help with resume writing, filling out job applications and setting up interviews. Additionally, many clients need an interpreter to sign for them at an interview. “They take a lot of the stress out of the interview,” Ken said.

MNS Executive Director Loretta Murray, Esq. said it isn't always easy to convince employers to hire people who are disabled. "When two people apply for a job, one disabled, one not, an employer may be hesitate to hire the person with the disability," Murray said. “We try to reassure the employer that it isn't hard to hire people with disabilities, and often, they are wonderful employees.”

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Murray said many employees who are disabled just need the opportunity to show their abilities to an employer. “Ken worked for many years and was a valued member of the work team,” she said.

MNS continues to support those they place in jobs. Each person is provided with a job coach who will work with the employer to help engage the employee in the work world and assist in finding an amiable resolution should any issues come up. “My job coach came in twice a month and would ask if everything was o.k.,” said Ken. “If there were any problems she’d step in and we would all go to the supervisor and talk it over.”

Also, some people placed by MNS are deaf and can’t speak to their employer without the assistance of their job coach. On and off the job, MNS coaches have proven to be valuable allies for the people they support; one such example being helping employees with circumstances that may make it difficult for them to get to a job, like finding childcare.

Mill Neck Services, which has offices in Mill Neck, Manhattan and Queens, includes a three tier employment program: for people who are deaf with no other disability; people with multiple disabilities and people who are developmentally disabled. There are currently 180 people in the program, which includes those with jobs who continue to receive ongoing support. There are approximately 100 people still looking for work.

The need for making employers aware of the advantages of hiring people who are disabled continues. Many don’t realize that hiring people who are disabled may make them (the employers) eligible for tax credits, for example. President Obama, recognizing how difficult it is for a person who is disabled to become employed, recently ordered federal agencies to hire people with disabilities. “That’s a wonderful thing because among people who are disabled, 70 percent are unemployed,” said Murray.

Once an employer hires a person with a disability, it usually fosters the practice in the future. “Their work ethic is tremendous,” said Murray “Ken is but one example of just how valuable someone with a disability can be for any company.”

Established in 1986, Mill Neck Services has placed more than 1,000 deaf, hard of hearing or otherwise disabled workers in over 400 businesses operating on Long Island. Mill Neck Services is part of the Mill Neck Family of Organizations, which also includes Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf, founded by Lutheran Friends of the Deaf in 1947, Mill Neck Manor Early Childhood Center, Mill Neck Audiology, Mill Neck Interpreter Service and Mill Neck Foundation for Deaf Ministry. For more information, please call 516-922-4100 or visit www.millneck.org.

Photo Caption:

Mill Neck Services Executive Director Loretta Murray with Ken Longstreet, who is hard of hearing. With the help of Mill Neck Services, Longstreet found employment at the National Weather Service.

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