



JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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Release At Will

Utzler is a CES Success Story

TORONTO-Linda Utzler embodies the purpose of the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities' Community Employment Service: to give special needs individuals a true sense of independence as part of the workforce.

As of Oct. 1, Utzler has spent 17 years working at the McDonald's restaurant in her hometown of Toronto. But she has been more than a worker; Utzler has become a mainstay at the site on Franklin Avenue. While she has held other jobs in the past, the 48-year-old has developed a kinship with current co-workers and regular customers and expanded her capabilities to include both janitorial and cooking duties.

Utzler spends four hours per day, four days a week at the establishment and, much like its motto, she's loving it.

"I like it," she said. "I like the people I work with."

Her duties range from cleaning the floors and windows to preparing French fries, but her skills are growing and she is assisting with other foods.

"I'd like to learn to do other things," she added.

Restaurant Manager Shawna Herrick praised Utzler's abilities and said they have grown immensely, adding that Utzler is a fast learner.

"We're teaching her to help more with breakfast. She's been helping us out," Herrick said. "She comes in, knows to clean and goes to her station."

Utzler's good work once earned her kudos as Employee of the Month and she has also gained a greater sense of independence, which is something her mother, Jane Bigler, appreciates.

"She needs to be with people on the outside, to have friends and do things," Bigler said.

Renee Pastre, employment specialist at the CES, said the program currently has 28 placements and Utzler is one of its longest-served consumers.

"She was referred to us and we tried to focus on getting her a job close to home. We did an assessment at McDonald's and she got the job," Pastre added. "She is a fixture there. She has a huge support crew. Her co-workers are very supportive and they took her under their wing."

In addition to work, Utzler enjoys watching television and movies, listening to music (with Alan Jackson and Elvis Presley among her favorites), spending time with her boyfriend, and taking part in activities at the Jeffco Training Center in Steubenville and her local churches. She has even competed in Boccie ball for the Special Olympics and attended the 2010 games in Nebraska.

For now, she is setting some goals for herself. Utzler, who has been transported to work by family members, hopes to obtain a driver's license. For more information about CES and its services, call (740) 266-3840.

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(Photo Cutline: Linda Utzler, a consumer with the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities, is heading into her 17th year at McDonald's in Toronto after being placed on the job through the Community Employment Services program. She is one of the CES's longest-served clients and has become a mainstay in her workplace.)

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