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SOUTHERN SPICE



Photos by Ricky Stilley/Times-Georgian

Part of Elizabeth Terzich's daily responsibilities is keeping a log on the care and feeding of the numerous animals taken care of at the Bed and Biscuit.

A time to honor veterans

The war changed them. Maw Maw often spoke about two of her brothers who returned from World War I with

mental scars from the brutality they witnessed during their service.



JOE GARRETT

"They never talked again," said Maw Maw. "Back then we called them 'mutes' because they rarely uttered a word and the war basically

destroyed their lives."

Most of us know somebody who's served in the military, or did so ourselves. For those who haven't, it can be difficult to understand what it's like to serve. It's easy to forget the many sacrifices that our service men and women make.

FULFILLING lives



through FULFILLING work

BY KEN DENNEY
FOR THE TIMES-GEORGIAN

Consider, for a moment, what it means to have a job. Beyond earning money to provide for yourself or family, work has a deeper significance for most people. It means applying a unique set of skills, proving oneself creatively and individually. In a word, work is dignity.

Yet there are some for whom finding work is difficult because of mental or cognitive issues. Although not disabled in the conventional sense of the term, these individuals can be overlooked by employers, sometimes because of prejudice. Such people have gifts that could be an asset to any company — their only barrier is the door to the hiring office.

A small number of people in Carrollton are getting beyond that obstacle, thanks to a company that believes that "anyone who has the desire has the ability to be successful in the workplace." That's the motto of Briggs & Associates, a Roswell-based firm that specializes in finding meaningful work for those with developmental and cognitive disabilities, utilizing a network of dedicated individuals across the state.

Susan Sapp and Jan Turner divide their time in Carroll County by providing emotional and professional support for those they have placed into jobs, and in seeking employers for other clients. It is a full-time effort, knocking on doors and making phone calls, to find placements that will unlock the potential of each of the individuals with whom they work.

"We're picky about who our specialists are because you have to be willing to told 'no' a bunch of times," said Julie Lawson, who supervises the region that includes Carroll, Douglas and Paulding counties. "You have to be persistent."

The persistence pays off in the changes brought to people's lives.

Elizabeth Terzich, 28, said that before she started working with her job coach, Susan Sapp, her life was "not very happy."

"I was not a very happy person, and it was kind of hard for me to deal with life in general," she said. But that was before Sapp helped her find a job at the Bed and Biscuit Inn, a "doggy day care" run by Carroll County Animal Hospital. Working with the dogs and cats (and sometimes more exotic animals) at the facility has proved to be a perfect fit for her.

"I love the people and it's just a good job for me," she said. "They treat me really well here. They're very kind people, very giving and sometimes I get birthday presents from them, or Christmas presents."

Terzich has always had an affinity with animals, starting before she moved



Terzich romps with two enthusiastic dogs in the fenced-in area behind the Bed and Biscuit. She says she loves working at the doggie day care and enjoys everyone she works with.

to west Georgia with her family from Illinois.

"I was really good with animals; they just know I am a good spirit."

Her job at the Bed and Biscuit is a mixture of work and fun, as she feeds and bathes the animals, while also taking them to a fenced-in yard in back to romp and play.

Make no mistake, however, that this is real work. As beneficial as it may be to Terzich, her job also benefits her employers. They have rewarded her efforts by increasing her responsibilities, and that confidence has

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Terzich pours water for some of the dogs she cares for at the Bed and Biscuit Inn where she works thanks to the Briggs and Associates job placement service.



FULFILLING

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inspired her to become more active and outgoing.

Briggs may have assisted Terzich in getting her job, but Terzich reaps all the benefits. The companies that hire Briggs' clients do not pay Briggs, which receives funds from state and private sources. All those who find a job through Briggs earn the money they make, and Briggs' job placement specialists insist that their clients never earn less than minimum wage.

Briggs operates as a "virtual company," with no brick-and-mortar field offices; only staff connected to one another by cellphone. Along with supporting the individuals with whom they

work, job specialists like Sapp and Turner are continuously seeking out jobs that are tailor-made for their clients.

The company was founded in 1989 with the idea that those who used to be sheltered in workshops or service centers could not only work in the wider community, but also flourish and develop there. All they needed was someone to advocate for them in the workforce, and to find jobs based on their unique needs. Those needs run the full spectrum of developmental or cognitive issues. They are individuals who don't fit into easy categories — and they can defy expectations.

Phillip (who asked that his last name not be used) works as a clerk in a Carrollton law office. Prior to that, he worked at a large retail outlet that was completely

unsuited to his preference for quiet, focused work.

"I prefer this way more," said Phillip. "Customers are not always the most pleasant people."

Phillip's office at the law firm has neat stacks of folders everywhere, reflecting the amount and complexity of the work he does. And the lawyer for whom he works has come to rely on Phillip to do the minutiae of routine tasks that, in turn, frees him to handle the actual casework that is the focus of his legal practice.

Phillip is currently in college, pursuing studies in criminal justice. Without the work by job coach Jan Turner in finding a job for him, Phillip might never been able to find this kind of opportunity for personal fulfillment.

But it also takes employers

who are willing to give people a chance.

Both Sapp and Turner say that Carrollton has been especially open to the concept, with several local companies accepting Briggs' clients. But that does not mean that the process is always easy — or that there isn't some prejudice along the way.

"I had a man who said 'I don't work with your kind of people,'" said Sapp. "I wanted to say, 'you don't know 'my people' because you've probably been served by one of them.'"

Even so, it can take some effort to find a position for Briggs' clients. But Sapp and Turner said that many are willing to a chance once they learn how the clients can fulfill "unmet needs" within their companies. Such an "unmet need" may be something as

simple as greeting customers or delivering mail — jobs that are necessary, but which might ordinarily be outside the primary responsibility of other employees.

Companies who do hire Briggs' clients find them to be hard-working, dedicated people whose performance on the job is as good — if not better — than employees with more conventional backgrounds.

With encouragement and trust, the employees can become integral to making an entire organization hum. But beyond that, it's just a good thing for companies to do — helping people who have dealt with a lifetime of being considered different by others.

"I'm a lot happier," said Terzich. "It's not as bad as it used to be. It's very exciting to be me."