

Lovebirds Café and Bakery Takes a Chance; Discovers Employing People with Disabilities is Good Business

By Michael Greene, director, Employment Services Pasadena, Villa Esperanza Services

IT'S 5 A.M., THE SMELL OF FRESHLY BAKED BREAD FILLS the air, and Jerome Hemenway is busy slicing the loaves of artesian bread at the Lovebirds Café and Bakery in Pasadena. Most days start like this for Hemenway, but by the time the sun's early rays stream into the dining room at 6 a.m., he has loaded up the bread and trays of fresh pastries, and is on the road to make his deliveries to the second Pasadena store, as well as the Alhambra and Monterey Park stores.

What's remarkable is that Hemenway is one of four employees with a developmental disability that work for Lovebirds, together comprising one-quarter of the total workforce.

An employee since February 2008, Hemenway is Lovebirds main delivery driver. He has learned to load, navigate and



Matthew Lindbergh and Kathryn Trimble outside the Lovebirds store in Pasadena.

Lovebirds Café and Bakery

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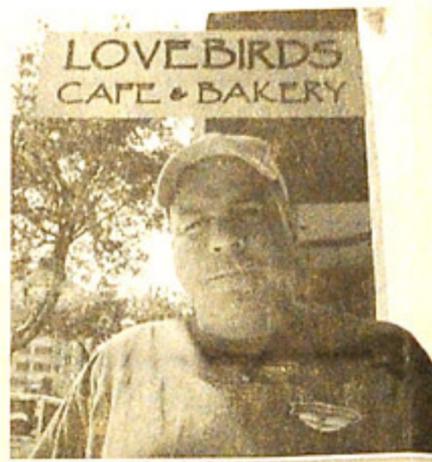
unload independently. When he first started at Lovebirds, his job coach was continuously by his side, but has since reduced his hours by 80 percent. His coach gives him a few pointers when needed and works on developing his customer service skills to help him be the best delivery driver he can be.

Lovebirds Café and Bakery was started in 1984 by two brothers, Jahanshah and Jahansooz Jomehri. From their original location in Alhambra, the business has grown into a total of five stores across Southern California. Much of Lovebirds' success can be attributed to the fact that the brothers have remained true to their core values of hard work and high standards of quality. This has consistently placed them on the cutting edge of several industry trends before an identified trend was even established.

A great example of this is that Lovebirds has been baking their own bread since the 1980s, not because it was the latest thing to do, but because they were dissatisfied with their bread vendor's service, and felt that they could do a better job. After many long days starting as early as 2 a.m., they are now master bakers. And in the years since, they have repeatedly discovered profitable niches by remaining true to themselves, and the shared values which come from their upbringing.

Since its inception, Lovebirds has made it a priority to offer employment to people from all walks of life. Owner Jahanshah (John) recounts stories of employing his customers' family members as they came of age, regardless of background and life's challenges. He mentioned drawing inspiration from the great Persian poet Firdausi and said that their family philosophy is "to have a positive impact on individuals and society as well." It was a natural extension then, when they were approached by Villa Esperanza Services in 2007 that they agreed to hire their first employee with a developmental disability to assist with the after lunch clean up. Since then, Lovebirds has hired four more individuals with developmental disabilities for positions ranging from delivery driver to dishwasher and clean-up/utility person.

As Lovebirds newest employees demonstrate what they are capable of, their responsibilities are expanded. John shares, "Jerome was initially hired as a delivery driver but now he is also monitoring needed lunch supplies and taking the initiative to go purchase them when supplies get low. We depend on him and without him, we would be in trouble. Other individuals, started with simple cleaning and now they sweep and mop, and do more difficult tasks such as moving and stacking furniture in an organized



Lovebirds Delivery Driver
Jerome Hemenway

way. When our dishwasher was hired we were told he would not be able to communicate; however, that has changed and he has become extroverted and will talk and get your attention."

Matthew Lindbergh, one of the employees says, "I like the job a lot, making money,

eating the food, cleaning. I get along with the people. I like John, he's a good man." Another employee, Kathryn Trimble shares, "I like the people they are nice, they treat me nice, they call me Kathy, they all know my name. I like the work, I've been working on my speed and now I finish before 6:30 p.m."

The greater Lanterman community needs to recognize that the path to success for the individuals we support will be paved by employers like Lovebirds Café and Bakery and the Jomehri brothers. So next time you are in Pasadena, Burbank, Alhambra or Monterey Park visit one of these establishments, order a pastry or a sandwich or two or three, use them to cater your next event, or place an order for delivery, and probably Hemenway will be the one delivering it to you.

Most importantly, take the time to salute the management for its commitment to hiring persons with developmental disabilities. Let them know that you are there patronizing this business because they employ persons with developmental disabilities. Our

sons and daughters, friends, and the persons we support will achieve their employment goals when we direct our spending power to the businesses that employ them.

Learn more about Villa Esperanza Services by visiting www.villaesperanzaservices.org or calling 626.449.2919. Their main office is located at 2060 East Villa Street, Pasadena, CA 91107. ■

Support Lovebirds

Lovebirds offers a coffee bar, a wide range of bakery items from cakes and pastries to artisan breads, as well as a lunch menu featuring soups, salads, sandwiches and other side dishes. Stop by any one of the five locations:

Lovebirds Pasadena 921 E. Colorado Blvd. Pasadena, CA 91106 Phone: 626.583.8888	Backstage Cafe 2520 W. Olive Ave. Burbank, CA 91505 Phone: 818.563.4567
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Lovebirds Alhambra 10 S. First St. Alhambra, CA 91801 Phone: 626.281.9999	Crown City Cafe 888 E. Walnut St. Pasadena, CA 91106 Phone: 626.568.0088
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Lovebirds Monterey Park
1055 Corporate Center Dr.
Monterey Park, CA 91754
Phone: 323.269.4400

Visit www.lovebirdscafe.com for more information about Lovebirds, including location hours and menu.

Learn About California First Lady Maria Shriver's Employment Initiative

FIRST LADY MARIA SHRIVER BELIEVES "IT'S ALL ABOUT WE" AND IN THE TRANSFORMATIVE power of working together to achieve a positive legacy for California. One of a variety of WE programs and initiatives, WE Include is her initiative for people with special needs. Shriver and Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger have made a commitment in California through their Developmentally Disabled Opportunity Initiative to provide individuals with developmental disabilities a chance to excel in jobs that give them satisfaction and purpose. On her Web site, Shriver says, "Many people often believe that those with intellectual disabilities can't work, but they do – in hotels, in retail stores, in restaurants – so why not state government? One of our greatest joys has been witnessing and sharing in their triumphs as they gain confidence working alongside others in their community – and it's been a resounding success. Here in California, we have individuals working in our State Capitol Office and in several of our field offices – the possibilities are endless and we have only just begun. My hope is that every State Capitol across the country will hire an intellectually disabled person because I know they will get as much out of the program as California has over the years!" Visit the Web site at www.firstlady.ca.gov.