

New work opportunity captures interests

Jerome Cosey, 50, has attended Opportunity Partners for more than a decade but often struggled to stay motivated in his job on the production line. The repetitive work seemed dull to him, yet he wasn't interested in pursuing community jobs.

A new work opportunity sparked Jerome's interest and uncovered his technical skills and ability. Jerome is now happy to be working, and staff members are amazed and delighted with his progress.

"Once he got started, he just kept going," said Myke Heffner, production assistant manager. "In addition to working hard and doing a great job, he is keeping his work area clean and showing pride in his work. In fact, we have to shoo him out to take his lunch break."

Jerome's transformation began when a manufacturer turned to Opportunity Partners to disassemble motor pump housings on a retail product. With a job this complex, staff typically divide the job into a series of tasks – some for beginners and some for workers with more advanced skills.

Staff noticed Jerome's interest was sparked when given the chance to use simple hand tools like a drill and needle nose pliers. Eventually, Jerome had mastered a 15-step process involving a circuit board, solenoids, hoses and a motor.

As his skills grew over time, staff guided Jerome from a job disassembling the product into a more complex assembly job. "Because he was comfortable using the tools, he could move into the more advanced position," said Jeff France, production manager.

In addition to Jerome, a number of other program participants were also proving they could master the skills required for the job. "I wasn't surprised," said staff member Paul Fredendall, who helped train people for the job. "Many of our workers were really interested in learning the steps involved, and they proved they could do it."

"As the demand for workers with technical skills increases, this is a good example of how Opportunity Partners is



Jerome Cosey learned to operate a drill at his Opportunity Partners job.

preparing workers for the jobs of the future," said Jon Thompson, Opportunity Partners President and CEO. "Our goal is to have a trained, capable workforce ready to meet the diverse needs in the marketplace," he said.

About the same time Jerome and his peers were shining on the production floor, Opportunity Partners managers were planning to launch a more formalized production-centered training program called OPTech. The program, which supplements career training offered in classrooms at Opportunity Partners, helps program participants learn to be better workers. When work demands permit, production staff members spend part of the day teaching clients a wide range of skills including topics like work-readiness, tool use, scales and weighing, and communicating with peers and staff.

"All of these skills can transfer to other jobs," Myke said. As additional curriculum is developed for OPTech, participants will experience greater opportunities than ever before to learn and grow through the program.