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MERCER COUNTY: Community Options takes pride and joy in helping developmentally disabled get into the workforce

By Philip Sean Curran, Staff Writer Updated 13 hrs ago



With his baseball cap on, James Grubb is a popular guy at his part-time job at the Acme on business Route 1 in Lawrence.

“You’re a pistol, Jim,” said supermarket manager Wendy Makai to him at one point Friday.

“I know, ain’t I something?” he replied.

Mr. Grubb, 53, lives with a developmental disability, one of 96 disabled adults in New Jersey who are either in the workforce or looking for work through the help of national based Community Options.

Founded in 1989, the organization has offices in 10 states, including the national office in Mercer County. Among its services, the agency offers job training and finds employment for adults who get referred from the state Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Division of Developmental Disabilities. They can run the age gamut from 21 and up.

“We take great pride and joy in what we do,” said Andrew Park, managing director of the organization, in an interview.

Agency staff will interview clients to learn what jobs they might be interested in and assess their strengths and weaknesses. They also provide interview skills and help with filling out job application

“So we just don’t find a job and that’s it,” Mr. Park said. “We find a job they will like, they’ll enjoy doing and they will enjoy doing for many, many years.”

Armed with that information, job coaches from Community Options meet prospective employers looking for jobs.

“I’m the one barging in and knocking on that door,” said Katrina Blaise, Mr. Grubb’s job coach. “What’s so great about hiring one of our clients is that this is someone who really wants to be there, who really wants to work.”

The work by Community Options does not end when a client is hired. The agency seeks to make sure people like Mr. Grubb keep their jobs once they get them. Ms. Blaise acts as a liaison between Mr. Grubb and Acme management.

“So I’m here to teach and to coach and motivate and be his cheerleader and make sure that he’s doing what Acme needs him to do,” she said.

Once they are hired, job coaches stay involved to make sure the clients get acclimated to their workplace.

Joe Brown was Mr. Grubb’s job coach when Mr. Grubb worked at a now since closed Super G in Trenton, and helped him find his current job in the late 1990s.

“He really loves doing what he does,” Mr. Brown said.

Today, Mr. Grubb works 20 hours a week, a job close by the senior housing community where he lives in town. He works in the parking lot collecting shopping carts and helping with customers, a well known figure in the community, Ms. Blaise said.

Asked what he likes about his work, he replied, “So I can get paid for the job I do.”

“He’s such a character,” Ms. Makai said.

