



Communications Office
News Release

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Positive Attitude Secures Stephanie Lewis a Job with Innisbrook Resort

ST PETERSBURG, FL – Stephanie Lewis, who has Down syndrome, wakes up each day excited about her job at Innisbrook Golf Resort and Spa. She looks forward to keeping the cafeteria up to the high standards set forth by resort owners. “They treat me good,” Stephanie says. “It makes me smile.”

She began her career at Innisbrook as part of the Extended Transition program. Innisbrook has partnered with a local high school to offer job skill training at the resort to students with disabilities. When Stephanie completed the program, the owners were so impressed with her work ethic and positive attitude that they hired her as a permanent member of the staff. “She really is a wonderful worker,” says Julie Soltes, Director of Human Resources at Innisbrook. “She has a checklist and works independently. She’s loved by everyone, just a little ray of sunshine.”

Stephanie is responsible for making sure the eating area at the resort is kept tidy. She wipes down tables and picks up any trash in the area. Her favorite part of the job is refilling the napkin dispensers. “I make sure it looks nice,” Stephanie says.

Stephanie’s mom, Tammy Lewis, is very proud to see her daughter working, and grateful she was given the opportunity by Innisbrook. “I think they’re great because they hired her!” Tammy says. “It’s giving her her own money. She pays for things she needs, and it gives her independence.”

Stephanie’s job coach, **Christy Brown**, knew Innisbrook would provide a great work environment. “It’s rare to find an employer that takes such genuine care of its employees,” Christy says. “The Innisbrook staff has, on numerous occasions, gone above and beyond what is required by creating a caring and welcoming atmosphere for Stephanie that she absolutely loves.”

“I’ve heard from everyone she works with that she’s a wonderful worker,” says **Zoe Sieber**, Stephanie’s Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselor. Zoe said she was blown away by the progress Stephanie has already made at the resort. “She is now even training other students at the resort,” says Zoe.

VR provided counseling and guidance, as well as supported employment services to help Stephanie maintain her position. “She always has a great attitude and is very dependable,” says Zoe. “She’s an exemplary employee.”

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Zoe says working with Stephanie is just one of the many highlights of her job. “I love being a counselor because I get to help people actualize their potential and increase their independence,” she says. “It’s a fun job because it always challenges me and forces me to see each customer as a unique individual, and I love a challenge.” She will never forget how great a fit Innisbrook was for Stephanie.

While her friendly nature is just one of the qualities that make Stephanie a great employee, a strong work ethic and taking pride in their job are some of the many traits an employer can expect from a person with a disability. This is a resource that Innisbrook Golf Resort and Spa of Florida has realized, and they have a rich history of embracing people with disabilities.

As a partner with Extended Transition, Innisbrook has allowed 12 individuals with disabilities to train at their resort during the past two years. In addition, Innisbrook has hired more than 20 people with disabilities. They plan to continue their commitment to giving people with disabilities opportunities to work at their resort. “We don’t do it to be recognized,” Julie says. “We do it because we think it’s the right thing to do.”

Florida’s Vocational Rehabilitation program is committed to helping people with disabilities become part of America’s workforce. Our employer-focused website, **FLJobConnections.com**, allows businesses to search at no charge for employees who are ready to go to work, as well as to post available jobs. VR has 80 offices across Florida, and last year helped 6,071 Floridians with significant disabilities find or keep a job. For more information about VR and its services, call (800) 451-4327 or visit **Rehabworks.org**.

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REMINDER FOR MEDIA--When reporting on stories about people with disabilities, remember to use language that puts the person first, rather than the disability. For example, use phrases such as "people with disabilities" (instead of "the disabled") and "person who uses a wheelchair" (rather than "wheelchair bound"); and “people with a mental illness” (rather than “the mentally ill”).