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**Communications Office****News Release**

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### **Cooking Up a Dream**

**Miami, FL** – “Success is synonymous with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR),” says VR customer Liliana “Lili” Ferri. When Lili first came to VR and met her counselor, Olga Ramos, she was unemployed and raising her three daughters on her own. Lili, who emigrated from her native country of Venezuela, cried during the initial counselor interview due to depression and stress disorder.

From the beginning, Lili talked about her dream of becoming a chef. Her daughters loved her cooking and had always encouraged her to open a restaurant. With Olga guiding her through the process, Lili began working on her culinary arts degree at San Ignacio College. VR paid for tuition, books, and transportation to class, as well as offered guidance and counseling.

She worked hard on her studies, staying long hours at school to work on extra credit and help fellow students with subjects that were giving them trouble. “Suddenly I was in college, and it was really hard at first and went really fast,” says Lili. “I kept reminding myself that I was doing this for my daughters.” She volunteered at college events. All that hard work paid off, and in September 2012, Lili graduated at the top of her class, as valedictorian.

Because of her academic success and volunteer work, the college decided to hire her as their operations and purchasing coordinator. Lili buys supplies and helps the faculty prepare the food for their classes. She also teaches the cooking class offered to the public twice a week.

Elsa Stadthagen, Lili’s supervisor, is happy to have her on staff. “Liliana earned a special place in our hearts and a lot of respect from everyone. She’s a great worker,” says Elsa. “I like to use her success as an example for our students to follow, including the ones that are currently working with VR.

When asked what it has been like working with someone who has a disability, Elsa says, “It’s been a very good experience. She works well on our team. I definitely recommend working with VR to find employees.”

Lili enjoys her new job and is proud to be working. “It’s good to be on the other side,” she says. “Now I can buy a car or buy books, if I want. Everything has changed, both personally and professionally.” She has reached her goal, and in the process, demonstrated her abilities and perseverance, not only to herself, but to her family and friends.

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Lili expresses her gratitude to VR and Olga , who trusted in her dreams and ultimate success. “Olga always encouraged me and asked how I was doing,” she says. Olga was a little concerned that Lili may have some difficulty at the beginning because of her limitations with the English language, but she made it through. “Lili’s very persistent. When she makes a goal, she goes all the way.”

Olga is a great role model for her customers. She began working at VR in 1979 as a secretary. After her children grew older, she went back school to earn her master’s degree and rehab counseling certification. She became a counselor in 2008. Olga also showed her kids that they can do anything they want to do. “No matter how old you are, you can meet your goals.”

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”).