

FEATURE

Hilton man enjoys job helping others find jobs

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — In one respect, Bert Marlatt's life hasn't changed much over the past year: He still pounds the pavement looking for work.

One key difference now exists, however.

Last year, Marlatt's job search was fueled by the loss of his part-time position as a maintenance worker. Now, he is paid to help others in similar dilemmas.

Marlatt, 66, serves as a field representative for Green Thumb, Inc. The nonprofit organization helps match adults ages 55 and over with potential employers.

Marlatt said he learned of Green Thumb during a trip to the New York State Job Bank last winter. But rather than get another job through Green Thumb, he was actually hired by the organization in February.

"I got a job helping people get jobs," remarked Marlatt, a parishioner at St. Leo's Church in Hilton.

Although he had never been directly involved in job-placement work before, Marlatt said his new employment path is typical of the people he serves.

"If you're out of work and you're in your 50s and 60s, you may have to start a whole new career," Marlatt said.

Green Thumb was begun in 1965 by Lady Bird Johnson — the former First Lady — as an initiative to place retired farmers in park and highway beautification work. The program now exists in 44 states and is funded through the U.S. Department of Labor, as well as through business and private donations.

Marlatt is field representative for Monroe County along with another Hilton resident, Jane Banduric. Banduric, also, began working for Green Thumb in February after a series of financial mishaps.

"I really overloaded my credit cards," said Banduric, 71.

According to Marlatt and Banduric, prospective Green Thumb employees must have a maximum annual income of around \$9,000. This figure represents the aggregate of Social Security and pension payments, wages and self-employment income.

For no charge, adults 55 and older can contact Marlatt and Banduric to find such positions as office work; child care; translating; machine repair; and health-care assistance. In addition, Marlatt noted, employers frequently approach him with openings as well.

Marlatt said his own past struggles make him sympathetic to the plight of many people with whom he works.

"I've been through it all. I've had prob-

lems with alcohol, drugs and divorce, and I've lost jobs. So I know what these people are dealing with," Marlatt said.

One of the first persons to be placed by Marlatt and Banduric was Teresa La Pietra, 64. She said she recently moved back to Rochester from Florida — alone — following a separation from her husband of 43 years.

"I thought I had very little competence. I had raised six children, and I had an inferiority complex because I hadn't been in the work force in years," La Pietra said.

With the assistance of Marlatt and Banduric, La Pietra landed a job this past June working 20 hours per week as an office assistant with the Air Force Recruiting Office in downtown Rochester. La Pietra noted that she prepared for her job interview by taking an interviewing course offered through Green Thumb.

"I realized that I did have potential, and a purpose in life. I still have a value — and that's important for anybody in my situation," La Pietra commented.

Banduric noted that most people she assists are eager to get back out into the working world.

"Older people want to maintain their dignity. They don't want to go on welfare or public assistance," she said.

Marlatt said that although Green Thumb does the placement work, it's the seniors themselves who ultimately determine the success of their job search.

"I tell them if you conceive it in your mind and believe it in your heart, you'll achieve it," Marlatt remarked.

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EDITORS' NOTE: Seniors and potential employers wishing to learn more about Green Thumb should contact Bert Marlatt at 716/392-9730 or Jane Banduric at 392-2794. For those calling from outside Monroe County, Marlatt and Banduric can put you in touch with a Green Thumb representative in your area.

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— Bert Marlatt



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Bert Marlatt, field operations assistant for Green Thumb, Inc., helps out-of-work seniors find job placements in the region.



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