

From Displaced to Dream Job

By: Veronica Samek

For nearly 13 years, Anne McNeil worked her way up from the shop floor to a quality assurance position at Qualicaps, Pharmaphil Division. When the pharmaceutical manufacturing company closed in June 2008, McNeil grieved the loss of a career she knew was dead.

When searching for a new occupation, McNeil found comfort in Alexander Graham Bell's infamous quote, "When one door closes, another opens."

With persistence and basic networking, the 44-year-old McNeil overcame her career speed bump. Recently, she received her food service certification and accrued a position in Windsor Regional Hospital's dietary department, an industry and workplace she's always wanted to serve.

Throughout the struggle of losing her job, McNeil took an active role searching the local job market to learn which industries were actively hiring. She also made use of the Qualicaps/ UFCW Local 175 Labour Adjustment Centre by networking and acting as a peer volunteer.

Mary Paré was the project coordinator for the United Food and Commercial Workers Union Adjustment Centre when McNeil faced her transition. Paré noticed McNeil desired an opportunity for change.

"She had initiative and let me know what opportunities she was looking for," said Paré.

Paré encouraged others to realize what she said McNeil already knew,

"It's not necessarily the end of everything, there is opportunity to do other things."

With the fundamentals of job searching firmly ingrained in McNeil's mind, she investigated career boards and newspapers for trends in different career fields and positions.

"There were many ads in the newspaper for work in nursing homes," said McNeil, who called the listed nursing homes asking advice on how she could qualify for the various position being advertised.

McNeil's persistence led her to the realization she would have to go back to school and obtain a food service certification in order to enter the field of work she was passionate about.

"If I hadn't made that phone call I would have never known how to get into the field."

McNeil enrolled in the certification course as a part-time student. She admits her concern about being the oldest in the class.

“Going back to school was very hard and intimidating, I didn’t know who I would be going to school with but we we’re all unemployed and about the same age.”

Her classmates became her support group, sticking together until graduation five months later. When McNeil finished she was proud of herself for going through the process.

“I learned how strong I was,” she said.

Before graduating, McNeil used her new-found persistence when applying at Windsor Regional. A few short weeks after graduating, her journey successfully came to an end as she secured a position in the dietary department of Malden Park’s Continuing Care Centre.

Today, McNeil feels more fulfilled in her new career. She encourages others going through a similar setback to not be discouraged and suggests the key is remaining motivated.

“It’s about asking a lot of questions, networking and being at the right place at the right time,” said McNeil with a bright smile.

Her inspirational attitude recently came in handy when her husband of 23 years experienced a short-term job-loss. Her ultimate advice?

“Stay focused.”