



*Seeking Employment, Equality and Community for  
People with Developmental Disabilities*

**SEEC E-News**

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## **President Biden visits W.S. Jenks & Sons**



On March 9, 2021, President Joe Biden visited SEEC employer partner W.S. Jenks and Sons in Washington D.C. When asked about his community involvement, owner Mike Seigel highlighted his partnership with SEEC's Project SEARCH program which led to the company hiring three employees supported by SEEC.

Meet Vincent! The first Project SEARCH graduate that Mike hired was Vincent who started working two days a week. Fast forward two years and thanks to his hard work and determination, Vincent is now a full-time employee. Mike's experience was so positive, he has now hired two other Project Search graduates. These days Vincent's responsibilities continue to grow, and he is the go-to person to train new employees and is "on the fast track to becoming middle management", according to his supervisor. Shortly after achieving his initial goal of obtaining this position, Vincent was on to his next goal. Anyone in his inner circle can attest to the fact that Vincent has always been fiscally responsible and fiercely independent. Well, after two years of saving and researching, Vincent has obtained his driver's license and purchased his first car that he drives to work! Vincent is truly an inspiration for his peers and we at SEEC are very proud of all he's accomplished to date.



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## The Building of An Employer Relationship: Qiagen

By Pam Toole and Pamela Odoi-Atsem



Throughout the pandemic, SEEC's Employer Outreach Team (EOT) has continued to build long term employer relationships with local companies that result in positive employment outcomes. One new relationship, slowly nurtured over the past year, is with a local corporation, Qiagen.

Qiagen is a German provider of technologies for molecular diagnostics, applied testing, academic and pharmaceutical research. Qiagen operates a manufacturing site in Germantown, Maryland where they quickly added Covid test kit assembly in 2020 to their already wide array of medical test kit manufacturing. They are currently planning expansion and we plan to expand with them.

After Steve Blanks made an initial contact in February 2020, and brought in the EOT, our collaboration was slowed due to the pandemic. Finally, in May and August of this past year, the EOT had the opportunity to tour their labs and view up to six possible jobs for SEEC job seekers. That visit confirmed what we already knew. We had job seekers who could not only fill but excel at Qiagen's assembly jobs.

Because they were overwhelmed with their production demands, we gave them time, but knew not to be discouraged when they were slow to respond. Understanding and recognizing what a business or industry has on their plate is a key strategy in starting and building any potential long-term employer relationship. We remained patient. After a few more zoom calls, introductions to production managers, a Disability 101 presentation from our team and a second site visit, it was time to identify SEEC job seekers.

It is worth noting that throughout every interaction with Qiagen staff, it was apparent Qiagen was a positive, open-minded and supportive environment, exactly the kind to embrace the inclusive, competitive hiring of people with developmental disabilities. And as one might imagine, Qiagen is on top of every health safety measure, testing their employees each week and following extensive PPE usage. This fact allayed any apprehension on the part of our job seekers and their families to consider Qiagen a potential employer.

One of SEEC's pandemic pivots has been for the EOT more closely collaborate with SEEC's

Customized Employment Consultants who work directly with job seekers. This collaboration allowed us to identify the best possible matches for the Qiagen jobs. We quickly identified four potential candidates and worked with their consultants throughout the recruitment process. EOT team member Linda Hoyt was indispensable in managing every communication between Qiagen and the SEEC teams, acting as a true account manager for this large employer.

In January, two candidates were hired - Guillermo and Jose who participated in Project SEARCH. Both were hired to work 30 hours a week as Assembly Kit Technicians. Guillermo and Jose completed their onboarding and training and learned about the business culture, policies and procedures, and work environment at Qiagen. They had to read through 29 manuals of policy and procedure which presented its own obstacles, but they persevered and were ready to begin learning their job duties. Their Customized Employment Consultants Pamela Odoi-Atsem and Melissa Hamilton were with them every step of the way, expertly managing the on-boarding process through to successful on-the-job fading. These are the first paid jobs that both Guillermo and Jose have had, and to celebrate, last week Jose treated his family to dinner at Chipotles!

The Customized Employment Consultants' expertise is precisely what was needed for a smooth transition at a new corporate employer where potential exists for additional opportunities in the future. Due to their overwhelmingly positive experience with SEEC, Qiagen is ready to move forward with interviewing for a third position.

The Qiagen experience demonstrates SEEC's success on many levels. There are the internal hand-offs from whomever has a lead to the EOT to develop. Then the measured and deliberate outreach the EOT practices to grow a relationship. There is the well-orchestrated communication between the EOT and all stakeholders. And most critically, there is the confident and collaborative hand-off to experienced, on-the-ground support teams to implement the final stretch of employment success. An appreciation of gratitude to all who came together to make this happen, not only for SEEC and Qiagen, but more importantly, for Jose and Guillermo who are now thriving in ways neither had imagined. If you have a lead on an employer that would be interested in partnering, please email Pam Toole at [ptool@seeconline.org](mailto:ptool@seeconline.org).

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## SEEC Staff in the News

On February 18<sup>th</sup>, **Karen Lee**, SEEC's Executive Director and **Nancy Eaby**, SEEC's Program Director of Project SEARCH provided testimony before the District of Columbia's Committee on Human Services at the performance oversight hearing for the Department on Disability Services and the Office of Disability Rights. Nancy highlighted the disparity in the rate of reimbursement between identical services funded by the DC Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA). Karen addressed the topic of limiting DC DDA eligibility requirements. Both recommended that the DC DDA stand by their commitment to becoming an Employment First State by incentivizing DDA providers with a rate that allows providers to pay a living wage to their employment staff.



SEEC's very own **Michael Petrick**, Program Director, Employment Services and **Pam Toole**, Employment Outreach Team Lead, presented in a national webinar on February 3<sup>rd</sup> for American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR) on "Reimagining I/DD Employment Supports" and how the COVID pandemic has led to

permanent and potentially beneficial approaches to service provision for Customized Employment and disability employment providers. They spoke about how SEEC and others have helped people with I/DD to live, work and thrive during the pandemic.

The YES! Center had its first in a three-part webinar series focused on strategies for continuing to support youth and young adults with significant disabilities in preparing for and pursuing employment during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first webinar, entitled "Creative Options for Using Virtual Training to Spur Career Development", was held on Wednesday, February 24<sup>th</sup>. SEEC's own **Sherry Beamer**, Director, Community Employment Network Department, was one of three panelists. Participants learned about dynamic models for using virtual trainings and technological tools for helping motivate individuals with I/DD and their families to continue to pursue career development goals during COVID-19.

**Meghan Dworschak**, Project SEARCH NIH Site Lead, presented on March 13th at the Council for Exceptional Children. The presentation was called "Project SEARCH Employment Outcomes from National Institute of Health: Ten Year Review". Panel members, including Project SEARCH post hire Van Berg and Maureen Gormley Senior Advisor, National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS), discussed program outcomes while also highlighting best practices, successes, and challenges experienced along their ten-year journey.



## Family Calls Scheduled for the 1st Wednesday of the Month

Moving forward, the SEEC Family Call will be held the first Wednesday of the month from 1:00- 1:30p. These virtual meetings are a means for SEEC family members to learn vital information, ask questions, and connect with others in the

SEEC community. If you are unable to attend, but can watch the recording, please feel free to forward your questions to be answered to [kbarrett@seeconline.org](mailto:kbarrett@seeconline.org).



## Virtual Wine Tasting a Huge Success

Thanks to those of you who attended our pod-friendly, socially distanced, virtual wine tasting on Friday, February 19<sup>th</sup>!! Wine and Spirits Consultant at Winebow, Kristi Delovitch, was our expert host who took us on a journey around the globe. 47 people attended and together we

raised almost \$4000 in net revenue! It was a fun opportunity to taste some new wines and learn about the wines and the regions from which they came! It was certainly a fun virtual experience on a Friday night when so many of us aren't traveling!

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### SEEC's Night of Stars Virtual Event Celebration 2021

It's Gala Season at SEEC and while we can't gather in



person, we are hard at work creating a virtual celebration to benefit members of the community who have intellectual and developmental disabilities.

We are expecting hundreds of people from Maryland and beyond to attend this year's online "Night of Stars" event on **Saturday, April 24th**. We will gather to celebrate and feature SEEC "Stars" including people we support who have persevered during this isolating time, staff members who have gone above and beyond to

ensure the people we support continue to thrive, employers who have provided meaningful employment to people with disabilities despite great obstacles, and more! If you are interested in nominating a "star" please share your name, the name of the person you are nominating and the story behind what makes them a "star" and email it to Katrina Kugel at [kkugel@seeonline.org](mailto:kkugel@seeonline.org) along with a photo of your nominee. Alternatively, **fill in this form** and we'll confirm receipt!

Interested in becoming a sponsor? Sign up and you'll be part of an exclusive virtual VIP reception with fun cocktails to sample, delivered to your door! You can click [here](#) to become a sponsor on our event site or you can email Katrina Kugel at [kkugel@seeonline.org](mailto:kkugel@seeonline.org) and she will be happy to help you. On behalf of all of us at SEEC, we thank you for your consideration. We look forward to joining together to help people with disabilities LIVE, WORK, and THRIVE in their communities in 2021 and beyond.

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