

WORKFORCE WIRE

Your Quarterly Connection to Workforce Insights & Innovation



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Welcome to the First Quarter edition of the Workforce Wire

As we enter the new calendar year, CareerSource Northeast Florida (CareerSource NEFL) has completed a new 2025-2030 Strategic Plan that will guide the organization moving forward – allowing us to adapt to the realities of a rapidly changing labor market, unpredictable funding streams and the accelerating influence of technology on workforce development.

At its core, this plan represents an intentional shift — from

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Fernandina Nonprofit Learns to ‘Sign’ with Clients Thanks to Customized Training

EMPLOYER SUCCESS STORY

A little over a year ago, Barnabas Center received funds through CareerSource NEFL's Customized Training program for employees to receive training in conversational Spanish to better converse with its customers.

Last year, the nonprofit agency based in Fernandina Beach leveraged the program again to train six employees with basic sign language to improve its communication with customers even further.

Barnabas Center Chief Executive Officer Jamie Reynolds, who joined with other employees in the training, says it represents the agency's effort to identify areas of its operations that are barriers to serving its customers.

“We identified that language can be a big barrier, so that’s why we did the Spanish training last year,” Reynolds said. “But we also realized that sign language, in a rudimentary form, can be another way to increase communication...that sign language was kind of a more organic, natural form of communication. People use gestures all the time, so we just thought that if we had a several keywords a some of us knew internally, it may make another difference in the lives of those we serve.”

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President's Message continued

compliance-driven processes to **impact-driven leadership**. It strengthens our focus on measurable outcomes, deeper community partnerships, and sustainable practices that ensure we remain responsive, resilient, and results-oriented.

When it comes to sustainability, we made some difficult but necessary changes in January to secure our own financial stability. This included a staff restructuring and a workforce reduction as part of our right-sizing efforts. These actions in no way reflect on the value, dedication or quality of the work of those employees who were impacted, but was a direct response to sustained declines in federal and state funding and the growing uncertainty facing workforce systems nationwide.

For our job seekers and business partners, I want to be clear: **our commitment to service excellence remains unchanged**. In fact, these adjustments better align our resources to what matters most — connecting skilled talent to in-demand careers and improving training outcomes that lead to long-term economic mobility.

In this Workforce Wire, we share recent training success stories from nonprofit business partner Barnabas Center in Fernandina Beach, and from T & N Xpress, a trucking, logistics and warehousing company in Jacksonville led by Nicole Mobley — who entered the industry thanks to early assistance from CareerSource NEFL.

You'll also hear from several job seekers who are now in full-time jobs thanks to the help they received from our team members — including a young woman who's now thriving in the electrical trade thanks to our apprenticeship training support.

Finally, we'll touch on recent events to pair job seekers with employers in the region, including how we helped employees with Kroger over the holidays as the grocer ceased food delivery services in Northeast Florida — along with new initiatives and events to begin 2026.

Thank you for your continued partnership and support. Together, we remain focused on the work that truly matters — **connecting residents to opportunity and helping businesses build the workforce they need to compete and grow**.



Cheryl Taylor

ECONOMIC & EMPLOYMENT HIGHLIGHTS

FloridaCommerce has announced that the unemployment rate for the Jacksonville region was 4.7 percent in December 2025 — down from 5.1 percent in November 2025.

Of the 891,976 people counted as the area's labor force in December, there were 41,628 unemployed residents in the region — down from 46,111 unemployed residents the previous month.

NORTHEAST FLORIDA DECEMBER 2025 UNEMPLOYMENT STATISTICS BY COUNTY

Source: Florida Department of Economic Opportunity

	DEC-24	NOV-25	DEC-25
CareerSource Northeast Florida	3.2%	5.1%	4.7%
Baker County	3.2%	5.1%	4.5%
Clay County	3.2%	5.2%	4.7%
Duval County	3.2%	5.1%	4.7%
Nassau County	3.0%	5.0%	4.5%
Putnam County	3.9%	6.2%	5.7%
St. Johns County	3.0%	5.1%	4.5%
Jacksonville MSA	3.2%	5.1%	4.6%
Florida	3.2%	4.9%	4.4%
United States	3.8%	4.3%	4.1%

The industries that gained the most jobs over the year were Education and Health Services (+9,300 jobs); Mining, Logging, and Construction (+600 jobs); Leisure and Hospitality (+600 jobs); and Other Services (+300). The top-three industries losing jobs over the year were Transportation and Utilities (-2,900), Government (-900) and Financial Activities (-800).

Fernandina Nonprofit Now ‘Sign’ with Clients Thanks to Customized Training, continued

SUCCESS STORY

The nonprofit serves as Nassau County’s comprehensive service center – providing free medical and dental services, operating a nutrition services program in partnership with Feeding Northeast Florida and providing other short-term help. This help includes financial assistance, budgeting and financial education, clothing and household items, and referrals for additional services. The agency also operates two resale stores in Fernandina Beach and Yulee to generate operating funds and provide donations to its clients.

Although customers with severe hearing impairment make up a small percentage of those coming into Barnabas Center, Reynolds notes that sign language can be used across many spoken languages.

“What’s interesting is it can be used to bridge different language barriers, so if we’re working with people who may not know English or Spanish we could potentially use some signs to increase our ability to communicate,” she said.

The training was conducted by Florida State College at Jacksonville Instructor Holly Varthkavi.

In addition to herself, Barnabas Chief Administrative Officer Catherine Dupuis, Empowerment Program Manager Priscilla Eljaiek, Dental Hygienist Chelsey Wathen, Staff Accountant Lidia Manzo Garcia and Front Office Receptionist Carolina Rojas took part in the training.

“We loved it...and then we would make ourselves use it the very next day when we would greet each other at work...and would also try to have full conversations that were nonverbal,” she said.

As a person who knew nothing about sign language before the training, Reynolds said it was a challenge – but the instructor was “fantastic.”



(Left to right) Barnabas Center employees Lidia Manzo Garcia, Priscilla Eljaiek, Catherine Dupuis, Jamie Reynolds and Carolina Rojas now have basic sign language skills thanks to the CareerSource NEFL Customized Training Program.

“Holly was deaf, so she’s a native signer, and she had two interpreters who worked alongside her,” she said. “She made it engaging and fun. All of us who took the class really enjoyed the challenge.”

Since Barnabas Center provides 100 percent reimbursement for professional development, and the initial training was an introduction to sign language, Reynolds says those who “have a passion” to take it further have an option to continue.

With about 50 employees and 600 volunteers, Barnabas is the only primary care clinic for residents who are living below the federal poverty line – acting as a “catch-all and stopgap” for those people in need.

Barnabas Center began in the mid-1980s when a St. Michael’s Catholic Church priest was joined by parishioners to launch Barnabas Center (which means ‘son of encouragement’) in a vacant church for people struggling and needing resources in the area.

CareerSource NEFL Customized Training Supports Apprentices at MetroPower

SUCCESS STORY

Breanna Else, an apprentice from the Independent Electrical Contractors (IEC) Florida West Coast Chapter, recently represented regional electrical contractor MetroPower at the 2025 SkillsUSA Skills and Leadership Conference at the Prime Osborn Convention Center.

Joining more than 6,800 student competitors from across the country, in one of the largest career and technical conferences of its type in the nation, the first-year apprentice competed in the Electrical Construction Wiring category.

Else said she enjoyed the SkillsUSA Conference, which was “a combination of showing off my craft and having fun” in the extra time available during the event.

“Breanna represented MetroPower with professionalism and determination and we were honored to support her,” said MetroPower Workforce Development Specialist Marcus Francisco. “Breanna joined our team after graduating from Camden County High School. The construction program at CCHS has been a pipeline for our apprenticeship program for many years.”

Else said her career in the electrical field actually resulted from a “fortunate” mistake.

“I accidentally signed up for an occupational safety class in high school, but I found I enjoyed the wood-working once we got out of the classroom and into the shop,” she said. “In the second class, with Mr. Carlos Jones Jr, we got to try out plumbing, electrical, carpentry and masonry, but I couldn’t understand electrical for the life of me. So, for the next class I chose to take solely electrical. From there on, I stuck with it until I had the basic understanding necessary to complete the project, and then I was also able to assist the other students.”



Breanna Else accompanied by her Department Manager Micah Dean from Jacksonville

Francisco said Else came on board with MetroPower directly after high school.

“She already had a basic understanding of the trade, so it was impressive to see her compete at a high level, even after recently entering the field from high school,” he said.

Through the CareerSource NEFL Customized Training Program, MetroPower receives funds to underwrite a portion on Else’s training and helps offset the cost of training for many other apprentices at the company.

Francisco says MetroPower has had an apprenticeship program in place since the 1980s to support its organization throughout the southeast and has expanded the program in Jacksonville since it partnered with CareerSource NEFL in 2022.

“We’ve have been operating in Jacksonville for about 10 years. We had our first graduate from our four-year apprenticeship program last year and have been growing in numbers ever since,” he said. “When I first joined MetroPower three years ago, we had about four or five apprentices. We’re now up to 35 appren-

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CareerSource NEFL Customized Training Supports Apprentices at MetroPower, continued

SUCCESS STORY

tices, and our relationship with CareerSource NEFL has certainly helped.”

To find potential apprentices for the electrical contractor, Francisco says the company conducts community outreach in the different branches it operates in the southeastern states, including North Florida, Tallahassee, the Florida Panhandle, Georgia, and Alabama – and through its sister company, Carolina Power in South Carolina. The company also works with CareerSource NEFL to promote its apprenticeship opportunities through its communications platforms and during the organization’s in-person recruitment events.

“In addition, we do outreach at high schools, colleges and universities directly to students, and take part in career fairs, and most of our apprentices come to us that way,” he said. “Many apply to enter our program closer to graduation so we can organize a ‘signing day’ or they also apply through our apprentice career center, and we can start them throughout the year.”

He says that MetroPower looks for students who, while they may not know much about the trade, offer the technological mindset, work with their hands and enjoy working outside an office.

“You can sense a shift in attention to apprenticeship programs...the quality of the programs today and what it can do for your career and what it can do for your life, financially speaking,” Francisco said. “Personally, I’ve seen a growing trend...our numbers are getting larger and people are wanting to do some type of skilled labor, and the graduates have a lot more opportunities to participate in some type of apprenticeship program.”

For companies that are not aware of the Customized Training Program at CareerSource NEFL, Francisco says the organization makes it easy for companies to access.

“Our company looks at different grant opportunities from the different locations we have, and this is by far the easiest,” he said. “They narrow down the specific things that are necessary to get the apprentices started and to manage the program. It’s very cut and dry. CareerSource Northeast Florida can point any business in the right direction to get them started.”

For students who are considering a career in electrical or other trades, Else advises them to be tough and persistent.


“Give yourself tough skin and, with persistence, you’ll be able to do whatever it is you have your mind set on,” she said. “And ask all the stupid questions, no one will remember them for that long. Also, though it’s not preferred, there is almost nothing in the trades you can break that can’t be fixed.”

Event Spotlight!

Virtual Job Fair

Nearly every month, multiple employers take part in our virtual job fair – this month, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Thursday, March 12. Job seekers and employers interested in participating can sign up below:

[Learn more and Register](#)

 Thursday, March 12

CareerSource NEFL Jump Start Leads Nichole Mobley to Successful Trucking Career, Business Honors and Recognition

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

From losing her job as a pharmaceutical representative in the great recession of 2008 to her most recent award as Ultimate CEO from the Jacksonville Business Journal, the journey of Nicole Mobley is a testament to anyone who thinks it is too late to start a successful career.

Mobley was in her thirties when she lost the job, pivoting to earn a commercial driver's license (CDL) through a grant she applied for through CareerSource NEFL. Today, she's CEO of T & N Xpress – a trucking, logistics and warehousing company in Jacksonville.

“When the economy flatlined during that recession, I wasn't tenured with the company, so I lost my job and was among a lot of people who were let go during that time,” Mobley said. “After that, I worked for a few nonprofit agencies and found that wasn't really what I wanted to do.”

It was around that time she heard about a grant she could receive through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which offered several opportunities that would provide financial support in returning to school to learn a new trade or skill.

Given that her father had a CDL, and she already had driven her father's tractor when she was younger, she decided to pursue a job in trucking.

“I stopped by the CareerSource Northeast Florida office on Southside Boulevard and asked about the grant, and they later sent me an email with all the details and I applied,” she said. “After it was approved, I took courses for 30 days at a CDL training school, National Training in Green Cove Springs. I received my CDL and it took off from there.”

With her CDL in hand, Mobley withdrew money from her 401K account she'd accumulated at her previous job, purchased a semi-truck and became an owner-operator for a company called Time Definite Services based in Sumter, Florida. She worked with them for about two-and-a-half years -- using her truck and the company's trailer. Mobley then purchased another truck and her own trailer – eventually building it to a fleet of 10 trucks and trailers.

“I lived here in Jacksonville, but I was working in all the contiguous forty eight states,” she said.

She then formed a company with a partner, T & N Xpress, LLC, which has grown beyond trucking to provide logistics and warehousing services.

“We sold our trucks, but use our trailers for rentals and we now have a warehouse of over six thousand square feet off of Lane Avenue and we're focused on providing logistics and renting out warehouse space for customers,” she said.

Recognizing her business success, Mobley was selected as the Jax Chamber's 2023 Small Business Leader of the Year by its Transportation and Logistics Council, was named a Woman of Influence by the Jacksonville Business Journal in 2024 – and is being recognized by the journal again this year as an Ultimate CEO.

Her advice for someone who may be facing a career change or challenge: knowing the space you're working in and seeing its capacity in the future.



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Jump Start, continued

“In the beginning of the business, I was thinking where it could take me beyond trucking, which led to the warehousing and logistics components,” she said. “I do government contracting...we even use our space for short-mile trucking routes. I utilize every arena of the transportation and logistics space, leaving no stone unturned.”

Based on her experience, Mobley advises job seekers that it's never too late to change the direction of your career.

“You just to have some goals written down and put a date to them...and that's very important,” she said. “I'm very goal-oriented and because of my logistics knowledge I was able to secure a million dollar government contract hauling meat for the Department of Corrections. That just shows there are so many things you can do with a CDL, you just have to see the future potential in whatever you're doing.”

One-Stop Job Center Partner: NCBA

PARTNER HIGHLIGHT



The CareerSource NEFL Gateway Career Center, located at 5000 Norwood Ave. in Jacksonville, also serves as the region's only one-stop job center – also referred to as an American Job Center. Alongside CareerSource NEFL workforce representatives, NCBA is among 12 agency partners on-site that provide additional assistance to job seekers.

The NCBA Florida office in Jacksonville offers a program funded by the U.S. Department of Labor that provides work-based training for low-income, unemployed seniors. The Senior Community Service Employment Program provides job training and transition services to help adults 55-years or older reenter the workforce.

“At Gateway, we provide greeter services and a job counselor, and our partnership offers another way to assist seniors who visit the center,” said NCBA Northeast Florida Program Manager Erica Hansberry.

“In addition, the career center staff provides us with referrals and resources for our participants, including job leads, along with assistance with resume writing and Employ Florida registration.”

NCBA representatives work Monday through Friday covering both morning and afternoon shifts.

Hansberry, who oversees operations in 11 counties in the state, says CareerSource NEFL is among 50 partners they work with – and most of its NCBA training participants are in Duval and Volusia counties. NCBA also partners with CareerSource divisions in Volusia and Alachua counties.

There are about 109 in the NCBA program, with about 45 participants in Duval and 45 in Volusia.

“It's been an incredibly significant and mutually beneficial partnership, and we are so grateful to CareerSource Northeast Florida for continuing this longstanding alliance with NCBA,” she said.

Laid Off After 20 Years, Neal Finds a New Job in Trucking

SUCCESS STORY

Racheal Neal had worked for Flowers Bakery in the Grant Park area of Jacksonville for 20 years when she was laid off by the company along with several others – including her husband Willie, who had 30 years with the company.

“I was devastated, because this was a place I was preparing to retire from, and it happened just before Christmas last year,” she said. “I didn’t know where to start as far as starting a new career. I knew I wanted to do something new, but wasn’t sure what.”

Her husband, who had decided to obtain a Commercial Driver’s License (CDL), had previously visited the CareerSource NEFL Gateway Career Center.

“He decided to go another route to get his CDL more quickly so he could start earning for us, and he had some driving experience...having worked in shipping at receiving at Flowers,” she said. “After he earned his CDL, Willie came up with the idea for me to get a CDL too and I visited Gateway as well,” she said.

At the center, she met CareerSource NEFL Workforce Representative Cheryl Scott, who helped her obtain funding as a dislocated worker to help pay for CDL Training.

“Working for a company for so long, I didn’t know where to start,” Neal said. “But Cheryl helped me with the whole process and we found a program that funded the training and allowed me to pick any school I wanted to attend. I did some research and chose National Training Inc., which was the best decision I ever made. It’s a very good school.”



The course took only four weeks to complete – and the company even helped her with job placement after she graduated last June.

Since her husband had chosen to be an over-the-road CDL driver, Neal wanted to operate on local routes so she would be close to home.

“I chose to go with the cement company Quikrete,” she said. “It’s different from what I did before, but I really enjoy it. After working inside a building for so long, I enjoy being outside on my own. I’ve met some amazing people since I started here, they all have been so helpful and welcoming.”

Neal says she and her husband have a goal: to gain the experience they need to start their own trucking company in the future.

“I really appreciate Cheryl Scott and CareerSource Northeast Florida for helping me with funding and recommendations so I could find my next career path,” she said. “To the next person you meet who’s unsure where to start to find a new career, I’d say start with CareerSource NEFL to help you on that path.”

Stay-at-Home Mom Turns to CareerSource NEFL for Help Reentering the Job Market

SUCCESS STORY

After Jacqueline Edwards gave birth to her baby boy two years ago, she decided to step back from work and become a stay-at-home mom for a while.

A Jacksonville native, Edwards had been working as a title analyst for a mortgage technology company until she lost her job in 2021 during the COVID Pandemic. Initially, she joined her husband in a self-owned transportation business, but when she became pregnant in 2022, she took a step back from their business to better ensure a safe and healthy pregnancy.

Following a three-year hiatus, and with her son old enough to attend pre-school, she was ready to “reenter corporate America” – but was surprised to find what a challenge that would be.

“I was trying to get back into the workforce, but I kept getting declined and kept re-doing my resume,” she said. “People kept telling me ‘oh, your resume’s being screened through AI (Artificial Intelligence) before it’s getting to a hiring person,’ so I was having trouble with that.”

So, on the advice of her mother, she decided to turn to CareerSource NEFL for help – which led her to take part in the Recruitment Wednesday events held every week at the Southside Career Center.

There, she connected with CareerSource NEFL Employment Security Representative Dana Zamot – which led to Edwards to meet with a hiring representative from VyStar Credit Union at one of the events.

“I told the VyStar rep that I’d been struggling because of the three-year gap on my resume, but she said it looked fine and to go ahead and submit it,” Edwards said. “Then, they called to set up an interview with me. I immediately went back to Dana and said I really didn’t know what to do at an interview.”



Jacqueline Edwards after receiving a job offer from VyStar Credit Union, thanks to a recruitment event she attended at CareerSource NEFL's Southside Career Center.

Zamot provided Edwards with some interview training and coaching prior to the interview – also encouraging her along the way.

“Dana gave me some tips and pointers for the interview and in the end, Dana said ‘you’ve got this... you’re going to be great,’ Edwards said. “Then I had my phone interview, and VyStar followed up with an in-person interview...and it all did go great.”

Edwards received training and is now a VyStar Member Service Specialist.

Edwards advises anyone in her situation to give CareerSource NEFL a try.

“I felt the people at CareerSource Northeast Florida really cared and they can really help you work the websites to find jobs, and provide help in doing your resume, interviews and everything,” she said. “They made me feel comfortable working my way through all of it. Even if you’re nervous about interviewing, they can help you through it.”

CareerSource NEFL Helps Resilient Roberts Build a New, Safer and Stable Life

SUCCESS STORY

Donna Roberts, along with her two children, had just survived six years in an abusive relationship and was homeless at the time she found CareerSource NEFL through Hope Florida – a community-based welfare assistance program that serves single parents, and individuals on government assistance, youth aging out of foster care and other individuals in need.

She attended a Recruitment Wednesday event at the Southside Career Center, where she accepted a job at TX Maxx and hoped to get her life, and career, back on track.

What she didn't expect was suffering a heart attack two weeks into the job.

"I got through it okay, but it was very scary," she said. "They're monitoring me now and keeping me on medication to ensure I don't have any more heart issues, but I was out of commission for about two months."

When she recovered, Roberts resumed her job search – working with Susan Worzel, a Workforce Services Representative with CareerSource NEFL.

"She stayed in touch with me throughout her ordeal," Worzel said. "Donna came back and attended another job fair in July, where she was hired by Woodforest Bank as a retail banker, which really aligns well with her past experience."

Previously, Roberts worked in banking and had her own mortgage company for seven years when her husband was diagnosed with cancer. She became his caretaker until he passed away.

"My children were six years old at the time and I got into a situation where I wasn't working and taking care of babies," she said. "That's a difficult situation to get out of, so getting a job was the key."



Donna Roberts is now back in the financial industry with help from CareerSource NEFL – along with assistance from other nonprofit agencies.

Also, the nonprofit agency Betty Griffin Center in St. Johns County helped Roberts obtain a restraining order and other assistance to leave the abusive environment. She recommends that anyone in her type of situation turn to the organization for help.

Roberts, who started working full time at the bank last August, said she "really feels at home" in her new job.

She says CareerSource NEFL proved to be a lifeline in getting through the medical emergency and into a stable job so she can provide a safe home for her family.

"I am so grateful to Susan and everyone at the organization that helped me achieve my goals," she said. "As much as I tried, I don't think I could have done this without the help and support from CareerSource Northeast Florida. A big thank you to them."

Her advice to single mothers who find themselves in an abusive situation: "Don't give up."

"My children and I are domestic violence survivors and I just want that to be an inspiration to others...that you can overcome it, start over again and create a better life of your own," she said.

Employer Highlights for February



Founded in 1904 as General Roofing Manufacturing Company, Certainteed evolved from a roofing producer into North America's leading brand of exterior and interior building products.

The company, a subsidiary of Saint-Gobain since 1988, uses Florida's strategic location near the Port of Jacksonville for manufacturing – operating facilities that produce materials like drywall and gypsum products, which are distributed through local logistical hubs.

As one of the world's largest and oldest building products companies, Certainteed has 60 manufacturing facilities, including the one in Palatka, Florida, and has over 6,500 employees throughout the United States and Canada.

For more information about careers at Certainteed, visit <https://www.certainteed.com/about-us/careers>.



Founded in 1955, Baptist Health is Northeast Florida's largest and most preferred health system with six hospitals and 100 emergency centers, plus convenient access to more than 200 points of outpatient care.

As the area's only faith-based, mission-driven, locally-governed system, Baptist Health provides care for every stage of life and includes the region's only children's hospital, Wolfson Children's Hospital, as well as many services that would not otherwise be sufficiently provided in the community, such as a continuum of inpatient and outpatient behavioral health care.

For information about the career opportunities available in Northeast Florida, visit <https://www.baptistjax.com/about-us/careers>.



MV Transportation was founded in 1975. For more than 40 years, it has developed into a leading provider of paratransit services in the United States. It is also one of the largest privately-owned passenger transportation contractors in the country.

In addition to paratransit, the company provides fixed route, campus and corporate shuttle, along with student transportation services.

Today, MV Transportation offers many employment opportunities in the Northeast Florida area.

For more information about careers at MV Transportation, visit: <https://careers.mvtransit.com/us/en>

For more information about job openings at these and other employers throughout the region, visit [Employ Florida at www.employflorida.com](http://www.employflorida.com) – or reach out to our team at info@careersourcenefl.com.

Past Event Highlights

EVENT RECAPS

‘Paychecks for Patriots’

CareerSource NEFL joined with Florida State College at Jacksonville (FSCJ) in November to host the annual Paychecks for Patriots hiring fair dedicated to employing veterans and their spouses during the college’s fall career fair held on Nov. 13 at FSCJ’s Advanced Technology Center in downtown Jacksonville.

Nearly 85 employers from a wide array of industries, organizations and nonprofit agencies took part, speaking with a steady stream of more than 350 job seekers during the three-hour hiring fair.



UF Health St. Johns Holds Graduation Celebration for 2nd Class of Surgical Apprentices

Friends, family members, representatives from CareerSource NEFL and hospital personnel all joined together at UF Health Flagler Hospital for a celebration for the second group of five surgical technologist apprentices to graduate from the program.

The 2025 graduates included Aubrey Brazeale, Lavarius Clark, Samantha Davison, Faith Green and Kathryn Hamling.

To meet the need for more surgical technologists, UF Health St. Johns coordinated with CareerSource NEFL to receive state approval and launch the first apprenticeship program for surgical technologists in Northeast Florida in 2022, graduating its first group in October 2023.



The second set of surgical technologists to graduate at UF Health Flagler Hospital in November included (center five, left to right) Lavarius Clark, Aubrey Brazeale, Samantha Davison, Faith Green and Kathryn Hamling, pictured here with Brandy Hopkins, UF Health St. Johns Manager Education Services (left) and Michelle Bejo, UF Health St. Johns Surgical Services Educator (right).

As with the first group, the five participants received classroom and on-the-job training over 12 months, with three of the apprentices already employed by UF Health at its hospitals in Saint Augustine and Jacksonville working in other areas before entering the program — all interested in moving into a new career. Apprentices did not need any required education above a high school diploma or GED and were considered full-time employees during training, receiving full benefits and pay increases as they learned new skills.

Surgical technologists prepare operating rooms and assist physicians during surgery. By establishing an apprenticeship program, participants earned money while they were in training and learned new skills, providing another method for the hospital to fill those needs in the future.

“It’s such a great program for these people who really need to continue to work and continue to provide for their families while they’re going through the program,” said Brandy Hopkins, manager of education services at UF Health St. Johns. “Two of the participants are single mothers, and one is a father who worked at our hospital in Jacksonville.”

The father, Lavarius Clark, was working as a pharmaceutical technician at UF Health Jacksonville and has already accepted a new position as a surgical technologist at UF Health Jacksonville.

“They all worked so hard and had an incredible work ethic, but I would have to say that I’m very impressed

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Past Events, Continued

with Lavarius because he lived and worked in Jacksonville and would commute every day over the last year,” said Michelle Bejo, surgical services educator at UF Health St. Johns. “As with all the graduates, they continued to support their families while they doubled with both work and training over the entire year.”

Bejo said the five apprentices were selected among 150 applicants.

“This program also proved life-changing for each of them when it comes to their earning capability,” Bejo said. “Upon completion of the program, participants began earning up to 50 percent more per hour than when they began, so training they received will have a big impact on their earning potential as they move on in their careers.”

In addition to their full-time apprenticeship roles, the apprentices had to complete 2,150 hours in the program, with 2,000 hours involving hands-on experience in the operating room.

Bejo said they provide the apprenticeship program on “an as-needed basis,” so there are no immediate plans for a new cohort at UF Health St. Johns. However, based on its success, UF Health Jacksonville recently registered its own surgical technologist apprenticeship program.

UF Health St. Johns initially worked with CareerSource NEFL, which provided introductory information and case-managed the program through development and approval at the state level with the Florida Department of Education. CareerSource NEFL also secured funding to offset the cost of apprenticeship training.

Bejo added that all of the apprentices from the first cohort in 2023 are still employed and working in their positions, giving the program a strong retention record.

Kroger Employees Get Holiday Help from CareerSource NEFL

Many Kroger employees about to lose their jobs when the Cincinnati-based grocer shut down its food distribution center in Jacksonville took part in a job fair hosted by CareerSource NEFL over the last week of 2025.

“We’re grateful to the employers who took the time during the holiday season to connect with workers facing job transitions,” said CareerSource Northeast Florida Manufacturing Industry Manager Roben Faircloth.



“Their participation helped ensure meaningful opportunities were available when they mattered most—benefiting both employers looking for talent and job seekers ready to move forward.”

CHECK THESE EVENTS OUT!

- Recruitment Wednesdays – Multi-employer, in-person recruitment events from 10 a.m. to noon each Wednesday at the Southside Career Center 11268 Beach Blvd., Jacksonville
- CareerSource NEFL Military Spouse Family Employment Advocate– 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesday, March 3 at Naval Air Station (NAS) Jax
- Military Sealift Command Hosts an In-Person Recruitment Event – 10 a.m. to noon, Tuesday, March 10 at the Southside Career Center, 11268 Beach Blvd., Jacksonville
- More in-person and virtual hiring events are in the works. Stay connected on all our employment opportunities at www.careersourcenefl.com/events

We value your insights and welcome your feedback.

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions regarding the content of this newsletter, please reach out to Melissa Terbrueggen, Vice President of Economic Development and Communications, at mterbrueggen@careersourcenefl.com.

We look forward to hearing from you and continuing the conversation.

Quick Links

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Our career centers are open Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

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Fax: (904) 892-8182

CLAY COUNTY

1845 Town Center Blvd., Suite 150
Fleming Island, FL 32003
Phone: (904) 213-3888
Fax: (904) 892-8185

DUVAL COUNTY GATEWAY

5000 Norwood Avenue, Suite 2
Jacksonville, FL 32208
Phone: (904) 924-1710
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DUVAL COUNTY SOUTHSIDE

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WELFARE TRANSITION AND SNAP SERVICES CENTER

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96042 Lofton Square Court
Yulee, FL 32097
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Fax: (904) 892-8268

PUTNAM COUNTY

400 Highway 19 North, Suite 53
Palatka, FL 32177
Phone: (386) 530-7089
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525 State Road 16, Suite 109
St. Augustine, FL 32084
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CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTERS AT AREA CAMPUSES

FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE AT JACKSONVILLE

DEERWOOD CAMPUS

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Room D2420
Jacksonville, FL 32256
Phone: (904) 356-5627 ext. 2951

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101 W. State St., Room A-1120
Jacksonville, FL 32202
Phone: (904) 356-5627 ext. 2954

KENT CAMPUS

Student Success Center
3939 Roosevelt Blvd., Room G155
Jacksonville, FL 32205
Phone: (904) 356-5627 ext. 2950

NORTH CAMPUS

4501 Capper Road, Building E,
Room 150
Jacksonville, FL 32218
Phone: (904) 356-5627 ext. 2958

SOUTH CAMPUS

11901 Beach Blvd., Room U-106
Jacksonville, FL 32246
Phone: (904) 356-5627 ext. 2956

ST. JOHNS RIVER STATE COLLEGE

ST. JOHNS RIVER STATE COLLEGE

Orange Park Campus
283 College Dr. A0006
Orange Park, FL 32065
Phone: (904) 276-6765

PALATKA CAMPUS

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