

## Group helps employees learn skills, confidence

*Elkridge Column*

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Shadrach Lazarus, 24, a Linwood graduate, has been employed at Good Deals, Great Stuff since January 2007. During his time at the store, Lazarus is developing job readiness skills, coping with stressful situations and punching in and out on schedule. "I like working at this store. It's great!" Lazarus said. (Photo by Susan Lavin).

**Good Deals, Great Stuff** is a division of the **Linwood Center**, a nonprofit organization that provides programs and services for both children and adults with autism. I would like to share this extraordinary place with you.

Located at 6520 Old Waterloo Road, in Elkridge, the organization is just behind the Food Lion over by the Gateway Overlook shopping center.

Good Deals Great Stuff is open to the public seven days a week for retail shopping, donations and to recycle gently used items. This hidden treasure combines wonderful opportunities to incorporate employment and training opportunities for people with autism who currently receive services in Linwood's adult services program and a chance for neighbors like you and I to assist in enriching lives.

I stopped by the store recently and chatted with **Phil Lewis**, who has taken on the role of store manager since Good Deals, Great Stuff opened their doors two years ago. His enthusiasm is both impressive and contagious. He explained to me that clients from Linwood work at the store processing donations, cleaning and performing necessary maintenance.

Lewis also expressed how important the journey is for these clients. They aren't just learning a skill, but gaining self-confidence, respect and poise. This wonderful store is providing a critical experience that will elevate these astonishing young men and women to the next level of independence.

**Shadrach Lazarus**, a Linwood graduate, is a 24-year-old employee and has been working at the store since January 2007. Lazarus is excited about working at the store, his first job. "I like working at this store. It's great!"

**Dwayne Nelson**, assistant director of adult services at Linwood filled in some details.

"Shad is developing job readiness skills such as respecting personal space, coping with stressful situations, punching in and out on schedule, appropriate conversation and other useful skills to help him procure and maintain employment." Lazarus has gained knowledge at Good Deals, Great Stuff and now is applying for jobs in local hotels in the housekeeping department, as an attendant at nearby restaurants and as a Wal-Mart cart pusher.

Lazarus enjoys participating in Special Olympics and is a proud member of the **Linwood Bowling League**. He spends time with his family and is a big help around his house. He not only takes care of his needs, but unselfishly looks out for his housemates, as well. When he has time to relax, he really likes to watch television.

Good Deals, Great Stuff is now accepting monetary contributions and donations of household items (excluding large appliances), clothing, recycled computer ink cartridges and cell phones.

"Donate the items you would give to a good friend," said **April Jensen**, director of adult services at the Linwood Center.

**Lorren Obura** has been working at the store as a job coach since it has opened. The clients need assistance and guidance when performing their duties and training entails compassionate people who work as coaches.

"I enjoy working with the individuals. It's so fulfilling knowing that I help enrich their lives," Obura said.

**Jim "Buddy" Smith**, another job coach at Good Deals, Great Stuff, enjoys his time in the store as well.

"This is a wonderful place and we make dreams into realities," he said.

As an alumni of the Linwood Center, 33-year-old **Denise Murray** has worked at the store for about 18 months focusing on job readiness skills.

Like lots of young women, Murray enjoys talking on the phone, socializing and shopping. She also visits her parents in Washington, D.C. often and is an active member of the Linwood Bowling League.

"Linwood and the store is a nice place to work and live. I love it!," Murray said happily.

The kids will be going back to school and I'm sure new clothes are on your to do list. Pack up all those clothes that are too small, along with bags of other no longer needed items, and drop by Good Deals, Great Stuff this week! The store is open Monday through Saturday from 11 a.m. until 8 p.m., and Sunday from noon to 8 p.m. All donations are greatly appreciated, and are also tax deductible!

For additional information, go to Linwood's Web site at [www.linwoodcenter.org](http://www.linwoodcenter.org).