

# Work plus school under one roof

## Hospitals' "School at Work" aims to promote, retain workers

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**S**entara Healthcare and Chesapeake Health employees, like everyone else in Hampton Roads, have a number of options to continue their education.

But for those at Sentara Norfolk General Hospital and Sentara Leigh Hospital in Norfolk, Sentara CarePlex Hospital in Hampton and Chesapeake General Hospital, one of those options means they don't even have to leave their respective buildings - or pay tuition.

The School at Work program, an in-house career development program, allows employees to learn new skills or catch up on long-forgotten ones.

And in some cases, like Zedra Bailey's, the refresher courses translate into promotions. Bailey, a former housekeeper and a nine-year Sentara veteran, is now the team coordinator in Norfolk General's environmental services department.

She admits there was one area she had trouble with in the program.

"Math was not one of my big strengths," Bailey said. "Because of the coaches we had, I got into the

different types of math."

It wasn't long after her graduation with the program's first class in 2005

that Bailey was considered for a promotion. And in Sentara circles, Bailey and her class had set the standard for future classes.

"It's like the pressure was put on us," Bailey said. "The first class was all environmental services workers."

Entering its third school year, Sentara's School at Work has graduated 25 employees with 35 now enrolled. The initial 2005 run produced 11 graduates, eight of whom were internally promoted.

"It's really a major effort, on their behalf, to take part and stay with this program," said Terry Bond, a career development specialist for Sentara Healthcare and co-creator of its program, about employees in the program.

Nine students are enrolled in Chesapeake General's program, now in its second year. A graduation ceremony for this round is scheduled for Aug. 24.

Promotions are the program's main purpose, said Patricia Pishioneri, education services director for

Chesapeake General. At least two students are being considered for

higher positions, she said.

"Some are in positions where the only way to be promoted is to go back to school," she said. "The typical School at Work student is working in housekeeping, food services or on the nursing assistant level."

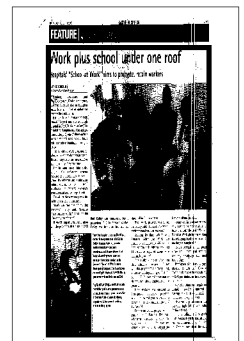
Topics covered in the program range from math and writing to anatomy, physiology and medical terminology.

Employees don't have to pay for classes. Sentara and Chesapeake Health pick up an estimated tab of \$400 to \$450 per student in their respective programs.

General admission requirements include supervisor approval and passing an adult basic education and reading comprehension test.

"It's really considered a bridge between high school and college," Pishioneri said.

Phyllis Gilliam, a June graduate and a Sentara Norfolk General medical records technician, enrolled in School at Work to learn about the medical



records department  
- all over again.

Gilliam, who was previously a cook and cashier in the hospital's dietary department, had taken classes elsewhere to become a medical secretary, but never finished.

"I had forgotten most of the stuff, so I used this as a way to brush up," she said.

"Once I started getting into it, it all came back to me."

The employee retention rate for graduates thus far is about 90 percent. There has also been interest about using the materials throughout the Sentara system, and some graduates are also enrolling in college programs.

"The RNs and LPNs ask, 'Can we borrow your books?'" said Marcus Moore, Norfolk General's environmental services manager and the Sentara program's co-creator.

The program schedule follows a regular school model, two semesters

across nine months. To graduate, employees must pass each class. A final exam is then given to determine individual skill sets.

Instructors and instruction methods vary by hospital. Teachers range from hospital employees to private instructors, and some classes are also administered online or through videos.

The School at Work program was originally developed by Catalyst Learning Co., a Louisville, Ky.-based training module developer. According to its Web site, 246 hospitals in 33 states have used the program since 2002. The program's content was developed by Anne Arundel Community College, based in Arnold, Md.

Bon Secours Hampton Roads Health System, which operates three hospitals in Norfolk, Portsmouth and Newport News, and Riverside Health System, which operates five hospitals on the Peninsula and elsewhere, don't specifically use the School at Work program. But they have their own in-house training programs.

At Bon Secours, classes are

offered in a variety of subjects, including compliance, policies and new technologies, said Linda Tjong, director of education and research for Bon Secours Hampton Roads.

At Riverside, topics covered include management and leadership development, computer training, as well as an office professional series, said Robin Rubenstein, director of the

Riverside Center for Organizational Excellence.

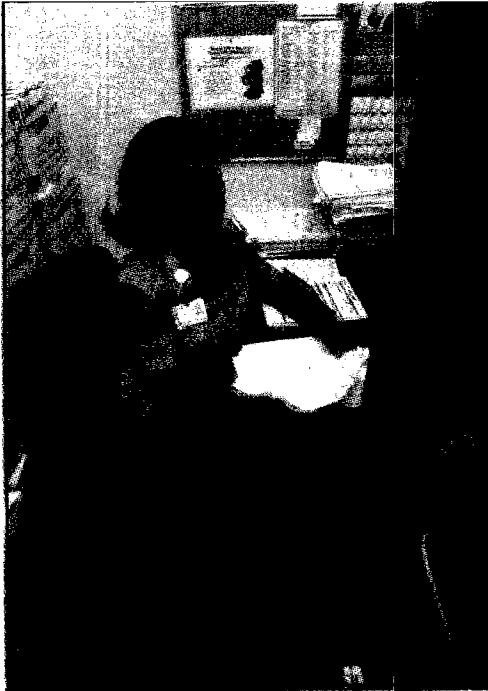
Requirements across the two hospitals vary. At Bon Secours, employees are given tests and a time limit to finish

some classes. At Riverside, while no tests are given, some classes are in sequence, so taking some out-of-order may not be practical.

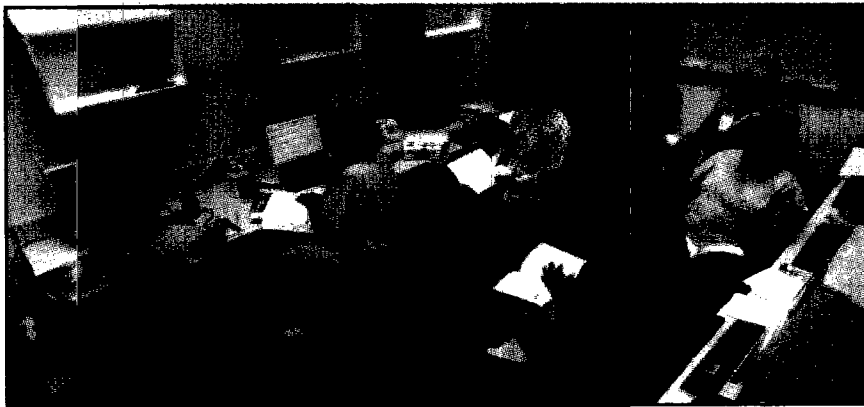
The health care systems all have one thing in common: None of their employees have to pay to take classes. Tjong and Rubenstein could not say how much each system pays to run their respective programs. ■



**Terry Bond (top left), Sentara Healthcare career development specialist, Zedra Bailey, Sentara Norfolk General's environmental services team coordinator, and Marcus Moore, that hospital's environmental services manager, have been involved with Sentara's "School at Work" career development program. Bond and Moore co-developed the program, while Bailey graduated with the first class in 2005.**



**Phyllis Gilliam (left), a medical records technician and a June graduate, made a switch from being a cook and cashier in Sentara Norfolk General's dietary department to her current position, thanks to the program.**



**Instructor "Mike" Harkins (in the rear) teaches "School at Work" class at Sentara Norfolk General, a program that allows for internal promotions.**

STEVE MORRISETTE