

# WATCH: Woman lands 'dream job' at Vineland Walmart

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Apprehensive to be a face in public before meeting job coach Jackie Hinton through Easter Seals, Tina Lopez is now working her dream job at Walmart in Vineland. Video produced by Justin Odendhal

(Photo: Staff photo by Justin Odendhal)

VINELAND - Welcoming customers to the Vineland Walmart is a matter of personal pride for Tina Lopez.

She does it with gusto.

"I wanted to work at Walmart and be a greeter," Lopez told The Daily Journal. "That was my dream job."



At 58-years-old, when she landed the position and got her blue vest, Lopez was so happy she cried.

She was not alone.

The women who her helped Lopez achieve her goal — Easterseals job coach Jackie Hinton and local Walmart personnel manager Dawn Berry — celebrated with a few tears as well.

After years of working at Easterseals New Jersey, Lopez wanted employment beyond the Millville facility. To be considered, she needed to reach production benchmarks and failing to do so was frustrating.

"I've worked here since I was 16 years old. I did packing boxes," said Lopez. "I started giving up on myself, my attitude wasn't good at the time."



Job coach Jackie Hinton pins Tina Lopez's nametag on before beginning her shift at Walmart at 1070 Landis Ave in Vineland on Thursday, July 21. (Photo: Staff photo by Justin Odendhal)

Lopez started to work with Hinton and they found the solution.

"She learned not to be so hard on herself," Hinton said.

Applying some patience, Lopez's job skills and outlook improved.

When Hinton's role evolved into an employment specialist, she continued to work with Lopez.

Hinton saw Lopez's potential and told her so.

"She said, 'Tina, you are ready to go out into the community,'" Lopez said. "I was so happy, I was overjoyed actually."

That kindness helped Lopez find her self-confidence.

"She told me, 'Tina, we believe in you,'" Lopez said. "She told me, 'you can do this,' because at the time I gave up on myself."

Lopez told Hinton of her dream to become a Walmart greeter. When she went to the store with her group home roommates, she would point out the greeter.

"I want that job," she would tell them.

Hinton made it her mission to make it happen.

"I see they have greeters, Tina wants to be a greeter, why not?" Hinton said.

"I went to the hiring manager before I even let Tina know," she said. "I told them I have a young lady in a wheelchair, all she wants to be is a greeter."

Berry listened and suggested Lopez fill out an application. Then Berry contacted store management about the new job applicant.

Hinton helped Lopez compile her résumé, which did include the part about the position being her dream job.

“Employers want to see that,” Hinton said.

Berry called Lopez to come in to meet with management.

“Miss Lopez, we have an interview tomorrow, could you be here at 3 o’clock?” she asked, hearing an excited giggle at the other of the line.

“Yes I can,” Lopez said.

Winning over the two managers who interviewed her, Lopez was hired in April.

“Listening to Tina makes me so happy and grateful to have been a part of her journey,” Hinton said. “What I do is nothing compared to what she did for me.”



Tina Lopez waits for customers to greet and serve fresh strawberries at Walmart at 1070 Landis Ave in Vineland on Thursday, July 21. (Photo: Staff photo by Justin Odendhal)

To help her get started, Hinton sat alongside Lopez “so thankful to turn up to work each day.”

Lopez would not only greet customers, she would acknowledge them as they left.

“They would yell back, ‘Have a nice day,’” Hinton said. “She put her own spin on it.”

Lopez is dividing her time between her part-time positions at Walmart and Easterseals, and enjoying some financial independence. A country music fan, she is saving up for a trip to Nashville and hopes to see Tim McGraw and Faith Hill.

At Walmart, Lopez has earned great customer feedback, Berry said.

In addition to her regular customers, she has new friends among her colleagues.

“Everyone here has been so welcoming and so helpful,” Hinton said.

“I got my blue vest, I’m part of Walmart,” Lopez said, pleased she got the job. “I was so happy and I’m still happy.”

These days, Lopez has a slightly different role, offering samples in the produce and bakery area.

“The customers are very nice, they say, ‘We miss you at the front door,’” Lopez said. She encourages them to visit her new spot where she still greets each person passing by.

She is content in the place she always wanted to be.

Smiling at Berry, Lopez joked, “I’m not taking her job, it’s too much stress. I like where I am now.”

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### **About Easterseals**

Easterseals New Jersey has been creating solutions that change the lives of people with disabilities and special needs since 1948. Their mission is to help individuals and families live, learn, work and play in their communities with equality, dignity and independence. Annually, over 7,000 people in New Jersey with developmental disabilities including autism, physical disabilities, mental illness and other special needs receive services in their programs designed to help them work toward achieving independence and full community-integration.

Source: Easterseals New Jersey