



Jennifer Willis
Job Seeker of the Month
April 2010

Like many American families, Jennifer Willis and her husband, Kevin, have always worked hard to build a life for themselves and for their two children, Dusty and Nikki. When Jennifer was laid off from her retail/buyer position in the summer of 2008, she immediately began her search for another position. Unfortunately, with Elbert County's unemployment rate sitting between 11.6 and 13.0 percent, job openings in Elberton and the surrounding areas were few.

Motivated by a need to bring in additional income but lacking the qualifications to compete against other job seekers in the area, Jennifer enrolled in Athens Technical College's business office technology program at the Elberton campus. While attending Athens Tech, Jennifer learned about the Georgia Work Ready initiative.

"Times have changed and holding a high school diploma isn't enough," said Jennifer. "Going back to school opened doors to positions that were not available to me with just a high school diploma."

Jennifer took the Work Ready assessment and earned a silver-level certificate for her efforts. Armed with her Work Ready Certificate, Jennifer renewed her job search and applied with the city of Elberton's Historic Preservation Program for an internship position. After completing her internship, Jennifer was asked to stay on in a research position, one that required a Georgia Work Ready Certificate. As part of her position, Jennifer was entrusted with seeking historical registry status for one of Elberton's oldest neighborhoods, a project she has owned since its inception.

Jennifer finished her program of study in December 2009 by attending classes part-time and is now pursuing her associate's degree. She hopes to eventually complete a master's degree in historic preservation.

"The city of Elberton is great about working around my class schedule. I could not ask for a better place to work," said Jennifer.

Jennifer also plans to take advantage of Work Ready skills gap training in order to raise her level to gold on the one section of the test where she scored silver. Jennifer credits Work Ready and her educational pursuits with creating opportunities that did not exist before.

"Without the Work Ready Certificate I could not have obtained this job," said Willis. "Working at the Historical Preservation Program has changed my life. Before going back to school and working for the city of Elberton, I would not have been exposed to my current field. I learned that not only am I interested in the functions of local government, I have developed a passion for historical preservation."