

New job means life for older worker

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Summary by Bruce Dale White, grandson of Lois Winnell Cunningham Price

In 1984, Lois Price shattered her leg. This accident caused her to lose her business and move in with my parents. The following article describes how she worked to overcome her disability and became the oldest person ever hired as a full-time employee of the State of Texas. She worked for the Texas Attorney General's Office in Abilene, until she retired and moved back to Elk City, Oklahoma.



EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the final article in a series detailing job training opportunities and job experiences provided by Green Thumb Inc.

By JULIE ANDERSON
Staff Writer

Activity in the life of Lois Price came to a sudden and unwelcome halt in 1984 when she fell and shattered her leg in 18 places.

Life, or what Lois considers really living, resumed when Green Thumb Inc. placed her in a job training environment 3½ years ago which led to permanent employment, at age 72, beginning last month.

Green Thumb is a non-profit training and employment program for anyone 55 and older who meets low income requirements.

The program, funded by the Department of Labor, pays for the training of an enrollee up to 22 hours per week.

"It was a lifeline for me," Lois



says emphatically. "It honestly has saved my life and everything else."

Now a state employee of Abilene's attorney general's office, Lois mans telephones, labels files and communicates with clients — just a few of her tasks.

"Progressively, she just took over the whole telephone (operation), which is miraculous as far as I'm concerned," says Virginia Creed, unit supervisor. "And she handles

clients really well."

Modestly accepting the praise of her manager, Lois returns the favor citing the understanding and patience of fellow workers during her almost 3½-year training period. No question was an unnecessary question, and encouragement was common.

Lois' situation illustrates the key to any trainee's success, says Nita Rodriguez, area supervisor of Green Thumb. The program enrollee must have an internal drive to work and learn, and the employer must have the personnel and patience to train.

No one questioned Lois' enthusiasm to work — once she learned about the organization, that is.

Her fall and subsequent operations forced her to relinquish the beauty shop she owned in Amarillo. After moving to Abilene to recuperate at the home of her

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Lois Price, a Green Thumb enrollee whose training evolved into a permanent job, answers phones at the attorney general's office where she was hired May 14.

Lois

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daughter Barbara Scobey and son-in-law Danny Scobey, Lois lost her sense of self-worth.

"She was so depressed," her daughter says. "Her accident ended up costing her everything she had."

Self-employment had nurtured her sense of independence, Barbara says, and that sense died with the accident.

While Lois was learning to cope and to walk again, the Scobeyes were learning the lessons that come with taking in a parent/in-law as a permanent resident.

Barbara credits her husband with the success of the living arrangement, saying not many mates accept an in-law with such warmth and welcome.

A large dose of credit must go to

Barbara as well, because she opened the doors of Green Thumb to her mother.

To learn how best to care for an aging parent, Barbara attended an Abilene Christian University-sponsored seminar, "As Parents Grow Older."

Barbara smiles a bit mischievously when relaying the incident, saying she told her mother the six-week program was a family relations seminar.

As Green Thumb, and other agencies, was discussed, Barbara realized that the path to renewed independence and self-esteem for her mother could be paved through such a program.

When Lois regained her physical strength and ability to walk, Barbara began dropping persuasive hints to her mother, which finally resulted in a call to the Texas Employment Commission.

Upon her acceptance into Green Thumb, Lois began active life again.

"I think if mother hadn't had this, she would have lost the will to live," Barbara says.

Lois had never worked in an office setting, but she told her trainers, "Show me, and I'll try."

Her employers were so pleased with her job performance, they signed Lois on permanently May 14, and the state took over her payroll.

"The things I do, a lot of them are to save ... other workers from doing little things that keep them from getting the larger things done," Lois says with pride.

People just don't realize these opportunities — chances for a new beginning, says Lois, who changed her life's course at age 72.

"They (Green Thumb) are creating an opportunity for people if they will only take advantage of it."

Anyone wishing to test his or her program eligibility should call the TEC and leave a name and phone number.