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THE TRANSITION OF MARE ISLAND CIVILIAN WORKERS BEFORE BASE CLOSURE — Part I

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For the past 150 years, Mare Island Naval Shipyard, located 30 miles north of San Francisco in Vallejo, has served as an important shipyard outpost for the U.S. Navy. Most recently, the shipyard has been commissioned to repair nuclear submarines. At its peak during World War II, the shipyard employed about 20,000 civilian workers. In two years, however, the shipyard will be one of the first large military bases in California to close. Over the past three years, the federal government has already cut half the workforce. By April 1996, all of the workforce — the last 5,000 civilian workers — will be forced to retire or find new employment.

Helping these displaced workers make the transition to jobs away from the base will not be easy. The average age of the work force is 44 and although many of them are highly skilled, there is little demand in the local economy for manufacturing or repair workers. As one Mare Island employee put it, "There are not too many things in this world that are cigar shaped that run on nuclear power."

Most of the workers at Mare Island have never worked anywhere else and are reluctant to start looking for new jobs. In fact, over half of the remaining workforce has been employed at the shipyard for over 20 years. Not only will it be hard for workers to find new jobs, but it is difficult to get them to participate actively in their job search.

At Mare Island, when the base was scheduled for closure, leaders in the community and on the base developed a transition strategy. In the community, the mayor of Vallejo created a committee consisting of shipyard personnel, politicians, educators, union leaders, Private Industry Councils and the Employment Development Department. They became the policy-making body that would create consensus when lobbying for federal money and coordinate transition programs. The

committee has done an outstanding job keeping this diverse group of individuals united. Through this collaborative process, they have requested and received \$8 million from the Department of Labor under the Defense Diversification Program.

The Shipyard Commander, however, was uneasy about waiting for public assistance. Instead of waiting months for the grants to be written, for the Department of Labor's approval and for Congressional appropriation, the Shipyard Commander set in motion an aggressive, proactive set of internal transition programs. In addition to these programs, every employee at Mare Island has been granted 50 hours of paid leave time to use in whatever manner they see fit in their job search. By taking these steps the shipyard Commander made transition a primary shipyard mission on par with submarine repair.

Not only is Mare Island unique in its proactive approach to helping workers make the transition, but it is also unique in the model it has chosen. The base has developed a program that is worker driven. Instead of completely relying on outside contractors to help workers prepare for the job market, dozens of Mare Island employees have been trained to help their co-workers. These programs include:

- **Career Resource Centers** with state of the art computer software to help workers locate jobs around the country.
- **Peer Counseling** to help workers cope mentally with the challenges they face.
- **Job Development Team**, a newly created department comprised of Mare Island managers and workers who develop job leads for co-workers.
- **Job Clubs** designed to bring co-workers together in their shops for support and encouragement while they begin their job search and retraining.
- **Paid Leave Time** for all shipyard employees to pursue whatever activities they deem necessary in their job search.
- **Priority Placement Program** which allows workers the opportunity to be rapidly placed in other federal positions around the world.
- **Labor Unions** that have taken on the added responsibility of helping workers find jobs in the private sector.

The table below is a summary of the services provided by each of the programs and organizations.

After reviewing this chart, one might wonder if it makes sense for there to be so much overlap among the programs offered. Why fund so many projects that offer similar services? One reason why this overlap may be beneficial is that it raises workers' expectations about the Private Industry Councils who are responsible for administering the federal Job Training

Partnership Act (JTPA) funds. The JTPA is a federally funded job-skills training program that provides disabled individuals, minorities and women with necessary job qualifications to gain employment in participating companies. In addition to this client base, the Private Industry Councils have been given the authority to help laid off civilian defense workers. Employees who participate in the JTPA program are provided with referrals of qualified individuals from the locality and are given cost reimbursements for training these individuals. The PICs now have to compete with the programs already offered on the base. They know that they need to work hard to gain the trust and approval of the shipyard workers.

Furthermore, the variety of transition programs at Mare Island serves another important function. Not only do the programs provide services to the workers, but they create an atmosphere where workers are constantly being reminded that they need to start thinking about looking for a new job. This is especially important with a workforce that is so resistant to leaving the base.

These programs could not have succeeded if the labor unions on the base had not been involved from the beginning. The Mare Island shipyard workers are highly organized and had to wage many tough battles. Although relationships over the past few years between management and the unions have improved, the unions view most of management's ideas with skepticism. Despite this historic conflict, management and labor have developed a strong partnership during the transition process. Union leaders believe that management is honestly interested

TRANSITION PROGRAM SERVICES OVERLAP

	INTERNAL PROGRAMS					EXTERNAL PROGRAMS		
	Job Clubs	Career Resource Center	Public Sector Unions	Job Develop. Team	Priority Placement Program	Private Industry Councils	Private Sector Unions	Employee Develop. Dept.
Job Ready Skills	✓	✓				✓		
Federal Job Transfer Prep.	✓	✓			✓			
Skills Asses.		✓				✓		
Private Job Listings	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Federal Job Listings	✓	✓	✓		✓			
Develop Private Job Leads			✓	✓		✓	✓	
Develop Federal Job Leads			✓		✓			
Retraining			✓			✓	✓	

in helping workers make the transition. As one of the labor leaders put it:

"I have seen some very positive things from the Human Resource Director. He's working with us. He seems to be sincere. No, he is sincere in helping us. He supports me 100% up here. About a year ago that wouldn't have happened with him but it is a different ball game now. We are adversaries. Whether it should be or shouldn't be that way we are. I'm not saying we're friends. We understand each other and respect each other. And I doubt we will ever be friends. But we all have the same agenda and are going the same way. We are definitely getting the support we need."

The shipyard spent just under \$10 million in one year on these transitional programs. Over 60% of the costs are incurred from the 50 hours that employees are given to invest in job search in whatever way they choose. The balance covers all full-time and part-time transitional staff, including employee development, career resource centers, and the job development team. Part-time staff hours include job club coordinators and leaders.

While these programs sound costly, the shipyard can justify these expenses not only because they feel an obligation to help workers make the transition, but they expect the program to save the Navy money in the long run. If workers do not leave voluntarily, then the navy has to pay workers health and unemployment insurance up two years after separation. Employees can leave by relocating to another federal job, by retiring, or by finding a job in the private sector. Depending upon the method a worker chooses to leave, voluntary separation instead of layoff can save the Navy anywhere between \$9,000 and \$38,000 per employee.

One very positive aspect of the Mare Island transition program is that it focuses workers attention on job readiness instead of specific occupation training. This makes sense because there is controversy about whether specific occupation retraining programs have a significant impact on a workers earnings or employment. In fact, a national study of several demonstration projects evaluated the effectiveness of three types of retraining programs, job search assistance, classroom training and on-the-job training found that only job search assistance had any significant impact on an employee's earnings and employment.

So what exactly is going on at Mare Island? What follows is a description of the Mare Island Job Clubs, an integral part of the Mare Island Transition process. In the next issue of the *Labor Center Reporter*, the Job Development Team and the Career Resource Center's will be reviewed. Although the Mare Island Shipyard workers have to face many challenges, the job club program is one method to help workers successfully make the transition away from Mare Island.

Job Club Program

"Yes, denial exists. But many employees are doing many things. Like Carlos, a welder, an old homie of mine. He is out there being proactive, using vision, using talk to go out there to tweak it, fix it, front load it. That is the kind of stuff that happens

when you turn the system loose on the individual."

— Jose, EEO Officer

Carlos, a job club coordinator in the shop: Carlos has been an employee at the shipyard for 12 years. He left his family back East where they are now spread out between New York, Florida, Virginia and Puerto Rico. Before becoming a job club coordinator about six months ago, Carlos worked as a duty storekeeper and a welder. Because of a shoulder injury, Carlos expected to be put on light duty status, but instead Carlos's supervisor asked him to be the job club coordinator for his area. Although Carlos did not know what to expect, he believed that his experience as an apprentice representative and his administrative duties as a shopkeeper would help him succeed. Carlos was also encouraged by the fact that his supervisor would allow him to work as a job club coordinator full-time. Not all job club coordinators have that luxury.

In preparation, Carlos took advantage of many of the transition programs offered. He gained resume writing skills, mastered the SF 171 federal job transfer form, and familiarized himself with job development techniques. In order to "smooth off the rough edges" as Carlos explained, he enrolled in the peer counseling program so he could better support his co-workers emotionally.

Despite his effort, Carlos failed at his first project as a job club coordinator. Carlos organized a series of meetings to talk to his co-workers about preparing the SF 171 government job transfer form. When workers wish to be matched for a new federal job at a different location through the Priority Placement Program, they need to fill out the SF 171 form that lists their qualifications and experience. The more thoroughly an employee fills out the form the greater the likelihood of being transferred to a desirable job.

The "talking-head" format did not work. A lecture on how to fill out the form was not very useful. However, Carlos decided to hold workshops instead, which gave workers the opportunity to work on the form right then. The workshops were a hit. As Carlos reports:

"And then what I did, I made it in a forum that they come in and get something done. We're going to use this time, we're going to use this time to do things with. So I took the 171 again, got proficient in that and I started doing job club workshops. I was doing it every day during lunch time. I made myself some transparencies of the SF 171 form and then I would go through each box . . . We would have some good turnout, about 19 to a class."

"And the funny thing about it is here I am, I'm hustling and bustling. But the feedback I'm getting is 'Hey man I was standing over by the tool room and your name and your workshops came up. You know, everybody is talking about them. When are you going to have more?'"

"So there is a need. I am starting to reach the people in the bilges which is my goal. I understand that people are in a state of denial and having hard times whether here or at home and they hide in their jobs because I remember doing that . . . But they're fortunate. I had surgery done on my shoulder and I didn't want to go in

on a light duty status, so the job was offered to me and I said 'Sure I'll take it'."

At first Carlos met resistance from some supervisors. Not all managers bought into the idea that the transition program was now an important shipyard priority. But Carlos avoided conflict by using some unconventional leadership techniques.

"Some supervisors were an obstacle in the beginning. But I did an end around. I didn't want to butt heads with them and I didn't want to be sicking their supervisors on them or on anyone. I worked on the concept of leadership by example that I was taught in my martial arts. Leadership by example and to give way. If something bigger than you is coming at you, give way."

Carlos would persistently but respectfully ask the supervisors for just a few minutes at the morning briefings. They were impressed with Carlos's presentations.

"When I made a couple of presentations they would say, 'Carlos this is great. It is working out great. Any time you want to disseminate information, the morning muster is the best time to do it.' So I used that more and more and it was working. So then they kind of got more respect for me. And now I have some supervisors coming to my presentations. It's working out wonderful."

Not only has Carlos used his time to help his co-workers prepare for transition, but he initiated contacts with those who may be interested in hiring steam fitters. Carlos contacted the private sector steam fitter union after he read in the newspaper that the oil refineries in the area were planning major retrofitting projects.

"I made the contacts with the steam fitters union just by reading the newspapers, because that is what they taught me. If you want to find jobs, don't look in the want ads. See what the community is doing because that is where the jobs are going to be developed and stuff like that. So I read in the paper that Exxon was coming in and all that. Even before the money was talked about. And I went straight to the director [of the union]. The big guy. I told him, 'Listen I know you will be needing welders.' And he said 'Yah if things like that happen I'll get back with you.'"

"And then about a month and a half later he calls me back and says 'Carlos do you remember me?' And I said 'sure I remember you' and I pulled out my notes cause I keep notes on everything I do and 'your daughter blah blah blah' and I knew that he pulled out his notes. Because we were going back to the same thing. And he said 'tell me how many welders do you have over there that you need to find work for?'"

"I told him 'Well I have 125 welders that I need to get work for' and he said, 'I'll take them all.' (Laughs.) Wonderful!"

Now all Carlos has to do is get his co-workers interested in the free training offered by the private sector union. Despite the fact that the oil refinery work is expected to provide steady employment for the next three to five years at wages compara-

ble to or better than at the shipyard, Carlos is having a great deal of difficulty recruiting workers. Carlos plans to take the training courses himself, but is putting his name at the bottom of the list. He enjoys his work as a job club coordinator and looks forward to using his skills when he makes the transition into the private sector. Carlos hopes that the skills he is currently using will prepare him for a possible management position sometime in the future.

Linda and the Job Club Coordinator Weekly Meetings: Linda worked on the shipyard as a receiving inspector. When the Navy receives parts from manufacturers, the parts have to go through a quality assurance system before being installed on a submarine. Linda inspected these components. Although she enjoyed her job because of the variety it offered, she eventually wanted to learn something new. She moved on to become an apprentice welder, but that program was eventually abolished when the base was scheduled for closure. Linda then started assisting her job club coordinator as a job club leader.

"Strange how it worked for me. First of all, my coordinator had never done this before so he was really new and he had to go through all the job announcements and trying to do workshops by himself and he was just one person trying to meet the needs of 200 people. So he asked for a leader to help him out. Mr. Jones [the welding supervisor] said OK and I volunteered."

"He said I could do it for four hours a day. Well it got to the point where there wasn't much welding need in the shop so that they asked me if I wanted to go to Work Center 29. I felt OK about it. And I asked Mr. Jones how he felt about it — me working over there for four hours a day and me working here four hours a day. He said 'I don't think it would work and I would rather have you doing it full-time.' Not too many people are doing job club leader full-time. We would write articles for the Job Hunter, our shop transition newsletter. We would let people know which people are leaving the shop, which were retiring and which were going to the Priority Placement Program. Trying to spark an interest I guess. Then I started doing it full-time."

After serving as the job club leader for several months, her job was once again jeopardized.

"I was working as a leader for shop 26 but because of downsizing my program got abolished. I was in the welder apprenticeship program. I could have gone back to my original code 130 as an inspector. But the experience I wanted to get was concentrated in out placement. So I told them going back to be an inspector is not what I really wanted. I really like what I am doing now which is job club. Bev [Employee Development Head] said she is always looking for people to help so she picked me up and put me in a higher position than I intended. I am really happy about it. We need someone to handle communications which is what I am supposed to do."

Instead of hiring someone outside to help with transition program communication, management gave the job to someone in the shipyard who was very enthusiastic but inexperienced.

They had confidence that Linda would succeed as well as anyone in the difficult task of improving communication. Now Linda is the chair of the weekly job club coordinator meetings. Even before taking on this responsibility, Linda saw these weekly meetings as pivotal.

Every Thursday morning at 9 am the job club coordinators attend their weekly meetings which serve a variety of purposes. Management has an opportunity to update leaders on transition programs. As Linda explained, "One of the reasons I volunteered to be a job club coordinator is because I am one of those types of people who likes to hear something from the top. I hate rumors. It bugs me. I like to hear things from the top." In addition, job club coordinators are free to make suggestions and give input on these programs. Often management will bounce an idea off the coordinators before they decide to implement the program. Sometimes management will have to change their plans based on the job club coordinators' comments.

For example, at one meeting the base transition steering committee wanted to pass out a survey that the job club coordinators did not think was very clear.

"The information they put out is 'What do you know about all these programs we have' and they list everything that is happening at Mare Island, including housing, travel, PPP, whatever. They have another column and 'rate it one through ten.' Well, the coordinators read the survey and they felt 'well wait a minute this isn't really clear.' So they started getting feedback. The steering committee said 'well maybe it isn't very clear. Maybe we need to change a couple of things.' So management went back and changed the survey based on our feedback before it was distributed to the employees."

The meetings also give coordinators a chance to learn from each other. "What we are trying to do as job club coordinators and job leaders is learn from each other about what we are doing that is successful that my club can imitate." If a job club coordinator develops an event or writes a particular article in his or her shop newspaper, others can learn from it and tailor the program to their own shop.

Job club coordinators are supposed to pass this information on to the workers in the shop. This happens to varying degrees.

"One of the reasons I like the job club coordinators' meetings so much is because everybody sees it as a method of 'OK we can coordinate with the coordinators and they can disseminate the information to the employees.' Sometime that happens and sometimes it doesn't. Depends on how dedicated the coordinators are to giving out their information. Some keep it to themselves. Some of them will put it in a newsletter. Some of them will just share it at job club meetings. Some of them won't have job club meetings. So really

it is how committed they are to getting information out."

Analysis of Job Club Program

The shipyard set up the Job Clubs as a transition program that would be responsive to the needs of the workers. The Job Club Program has two main purposes.

1. Facilitate communication between management and the workforce and vice versa on transition program development and implementation.
2. Encourage workers to support each other through the transition process.

Most shops on the shipyard have job club coordinators like Carlos who are responsible for developing a job club in his or her shop. The job club coordinators and leaders who assist them pump the blood through the job club system. Not only do they act as the liaison between management and the workers in the shop on transition issues, but they are responsible for developing specific programs to help workers within their own shops. The hours they spend on job club activities depend on the shop superintendent. Their job club hours can range from 10 to 40 hours per week. Their success is often dependent on the degree of their supervisor's support.

The job clubs at Mare Island not only helps facilitate the variety of transition programs on the shipyard but also serves an important secondary function as a training ground for the leaders and coordinators who will need to find new jobs themselves. Workers gain valuable experience managing people and activities that will help them in whatever careers they choose after they leave the shipyard. Linda hopes to continue in the out placement field, an occupation that will be much more likely than welding to expand. Carlos is quite optimistic about his future, thanks to the opportunity the Job Club program created for him. As Carlos reports:

"I'm going to go to the private sector! You think I set this up with the steam fitters without putting my foot in the door? [Laughs] I'm a welder. Who better knows the welders? Who can better represent the welders? Yes I'll go for the training. I've got myself at the bottom of the list. Other people thought 'Carlos is going to be in the first class'. No I'll be in the last class. But I'll be there. And hopefully with the training and experience here that when I go over there I will improve myself as a welder and when I get older I can go into a managerial area over there. And that is what I'm looking for. I'm excited about it. I'll take my job club coordinator skills with me."

In the next issue of the *Labor Center Reporter*, the Job Development Team and the Career Resource Center's will be reviewed.

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