



At Spectrum, employees find it pays to learn

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By Beth Loechler

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GRAND RAPIDS -- A year ago, Ilka Guzman was mopping floors at Spectrum Health Butterworth Campus.

Now, she is a secretary in the hospital's intensive care unit. She has a desk and computer and spends her days typing doctors' orders, answering phones and running reports and samples to and from the medical lab.

She also gets a fatter paycheck -- by \$4 an hour -- and better benefits.

The promotion came about after Guzman went back to school -- at work. For two hours every Monday, January through August, she attended School At Work, a program designed to help hospital employees in housekeeping and food services secure higher-paying jobs.

"It was really motivating. It helped me move on," said 30-year-old Guzman, a native of the Dominican Republic. "They teach you, and they pay for the time taking classes."

That's right. For 32 weeks, employees selected for School At Work take two hours of each Monday afternoon to sit in a hospital classroom and learn medical terminology, basic math, communication and computer skills, resume writing and how to better manage their time. They even get tips on applying for financial aid for college.

"We want them to have the opportunity to grow within the organization, but they come in here with a high school diploma only," said Diana Baranoski, who teaches some of the classes as part of her job with Spectrum's human resources department.

Guzman was a member of the first graduating class of 10 last fall. This month, a second group, this time at the Blodgett Campus, began the program.

Elizabeth Wolever, one of eight current students, is trying to set a good example for her children.

She quit college years ago, but wants her kids to realize "they'll have to go to

college to get anywhere."

School At Work wasn't Spectrum's idea. It's a curriculum, created by Kentucky-based Catalyst Learning Co., that has been purchased and used by more than 300 hospitals nationwide. Spectrum is the only West Michigan hospital involved.

The program isn't expensive. It costs Spectrum only about \$14,200 a year in materials and staff wages, but it's reaping large rewards in terms of employee retention and morale, Baranoski said.

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