

Toyota Helps Build Careers for Everyone

October 16, 2024

Image not found or type unknown

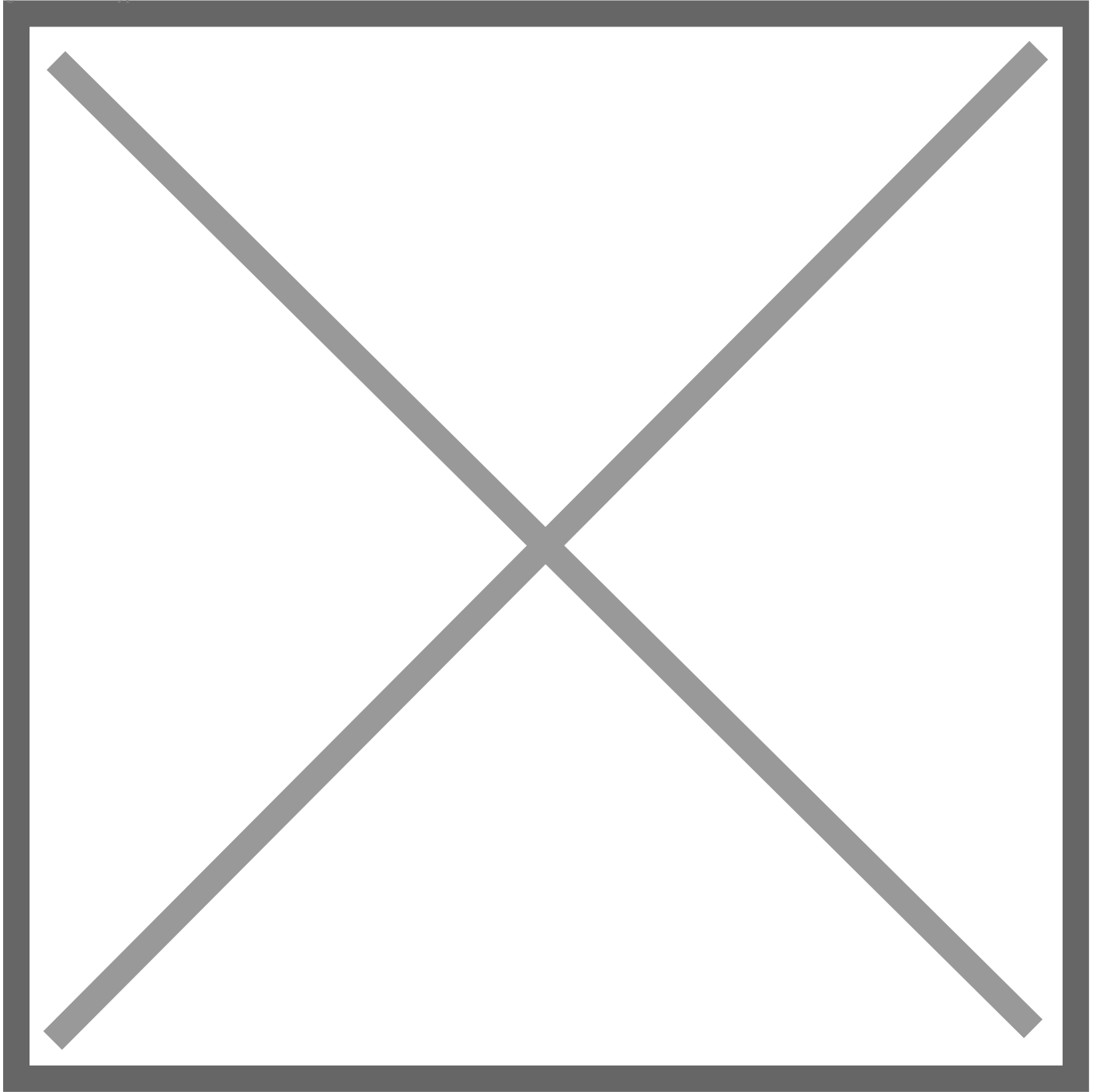


Delbert Lemley comes to work at Toyota West Virginia three days a week. He badges in at the security gate, walks to his work area, takes a seat at a small grey-top table and begins assembling vacuum regulating valves.

Lemley is meticulous. He selects a valve from a cardboard box, closely inspecting the piece before placing it on the jig in front of him. Once it's secure, he selects a small hose from a box, dips it in a tiny dish of alcohol and secures it to the valve.

Amid the humming fan behind him and the ongoing din of friendly banter in the room, he carefully reexamines his work to make sure it is exactly right. Satisfied, he places the valve securely in a container and starts the process again

Image not found or type unknown



Lemley, 51, is part of Toyota West Virginia's Partnership for Adults with Disabilities, a growing, collaborative effort with local healthcare providers that help identify jobs for individuals with disabilities. Working with automotive parts is nothing new for Lemley.

"When I was a kid, I started holding the light for my uncle when he was working on cars," he said.

Lemley talks openly about his past. With help from his mother, he had plans to open his own automotive repair shop. Everything was put on hold when she developed brain cancer in 2017. She died just two months after her initial diagnosis.

"It just hit me hard," he said. "I didn't handle it well. And then a year later, my house burned down"

Those tragedies sent him to what he calls "a dark place." He spent three years experiencing homelessness and struggling with mental health challenges.

With help, he was able to get back on his feet and now he's working at Toyota. Along with the rest of the crew in Partnership for Adults with Disabilities, Lemley and his coworkers have assembled more than 2 million parts, including wire sensors, oil jets and gaskets.

Lemley said he likes the work he's doing now, and he likes his role. "They treat me with respect," he said.

A Father's Dream for His Son

Ted Brown, vice president of manufacturing at Toyota Indiana, simply wanted a place where his son could be included. Zach, 27, was born with spina bifida, a condition where the spine and spinal cord don't form properly. Although he can now walk without assistance, Zach still struggles with learning disabilities and has difficulties with social interaction.

Knowing that other families were facing similar challenges, Brown decided to do something about it. In 2014, he led an effort at the plant to host a cohort of people with disabilities.

Their work area would be away from the constant hustle and bustle of Toyota Indiana team members assembling Siennas and Highlanders. This would be a place where they could build skills, grow into their new roles and learn at their own pace.

Just one year later, they welcomed another group. And then another. Now, through the plant's New Frontiers training initiative, many of the workers who begin their career in this program can transition to full time employment.

Over the past seven years, almost 60 people in the New Frontier program have started working on the main production line or in other areas of the plant.

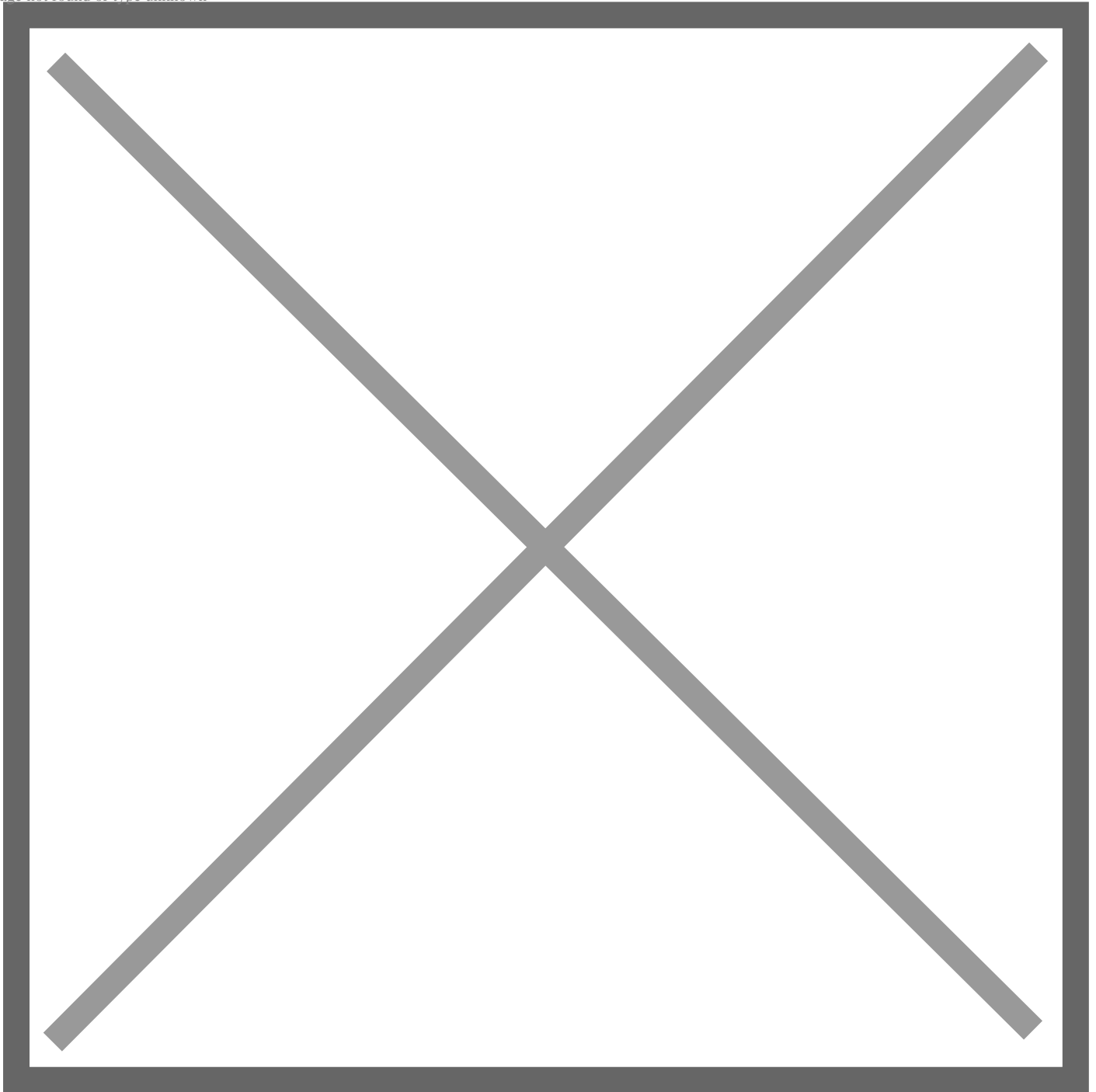
"Toyota prides itself on inclusion of everybody in our community," said Brown. "The inclusion of people with disabilities is a big deal for me."

Zach now works at the plant, has his own apartment, and is living independently.

Team Members Supporting Team Members

The newest iteration of Toyota's commitment to an inclusive workforce kicked off earlier this year at Toyota Texas. The plant celebrated the grand opening of the ToyotAbility Production Center (TPC), a dedicated workspace within the plant that employs people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in assembly subcomponent work.

Image not found or type unknown



The ToyotAbility business partnering group (BPG) was the driving force behind the TPC. Toyota's business partnering groups are voluntary employee-driven groups that support business objectives and community outreach goals. ToyotAbility's mission is to support individuals and groups across a broad spectrum of visible, invisible, temporary and permanent disabilities.

The design of the TPC included special considerations for soundproofing, visual cues, accessibility and proximity to plant resources.

“Working with ToyotAbility gave us real insight on how to design and properly develop this space,” said Rob Franklin, Toyota Texas vice president of administration and ToyotAbility executive sponsor. “This amazing team assembles many parts a day, while embodying Toyota’s values of diversity, inclusion and the kaizen/continuous improvement mindset.”

The first employee started in April 2024 and the TPC now has six employees. They have assembled nearly 240,000 parts to date to contribute to the assembly of Tundras and Sequoias.

Toyota is committed to fostering an open, inclusive workplace. To learn more about Toyota’s manufacturing plants, please visit the [Toyota Newsroom](#).