

Eliane Valde

2008 Chet Perry Achiever of the Year

When Eliane Valde came to the United States with her husband and children six years ago, she didn't know what to expect. Eliane only knew what her sister had told her that moving to America would provide Eliane's family with a better life than in their native land, Haiti.

Goodwill Employment Consultant Wernie Jeremie explains that language barriers are often the most difficult obstacles for Haitian immigrants to overcome. "Many are highly educated in their native country and have years of work experience," she says. "But without English skills, it's like starting all over."

"Eliane came here without any knowledge of the English language," explains Goodwill Administrative Assistant Alice DeClemente. "She had to learn our language and learn our culture. In order to live a peaceful life, she had to leave her home."

Eliane and her family lived with her sister in New York for a year, and heard about Southwest Florida through word-of-mouth in the Haitian community. Seeking a warmer place to live and more opportunities, Eliane, her husband, and their young family traveled south.

Despite her language barriers, Eliane found a part-time job as a cashier at a grocery store. While she enjoyed the work, she also recognized that she needed a full-time position to help support her family.

Eliane found out about Goodwill because of the agency's Haitian Outreach program, which provides guidance and employment assistance for Haitian immigrants in Southwest Florida. A Goodwill employment consultant soon found Eliane a job in Goodwill's processing plant in North Fort Myers, sorting clothing and other items on the night shift.

**"Goodwill gave me a full-time job," she says.
"I needed that to help take care of my family."**

After a year at Goodwill, Eliane was given a new opportunity, as the housekeeper at Goodwill's administrative headquarters. She gladly took the opportunity. "I wanted a morning job," she explains, "working in the daytime, to be with my family more."

Eliane says her English language skills are improving, thanks to her children's help. She hopes to go back to school one day to study nursing, and eventually care for the elderly. In the meantime, she's left a big impression on her co-workers at Goodwill, who are excited that Eliane has been named Achiever of the Year. "I'm just so impressed with her," says DeClemente. "Especially her smile."

