

Unemployed HVAC Contractor Finds His Future in the Utah Weatherization Program Thanks to the Recovery Act!

*As told to Lina Karaoglanova, Economic Opportunity Studies
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Mark Ardelean, Furnace Installer, Salt Lake City, Utah

Mark has been a heating, ventilation and air conditioning contractor for about 20 years, but, as a result of the housing crisis, he was unemployed for 7 months from 2008 into 2009. He and his wife had to go without many things in order to pay their mortgage. He was on his last week of unemployment benefits when he got word that he would be starting a job in Salt Lake Community Action Agency's Weatherization Program.

At 56 years old, he says *"It's really changed me, I used to hate my job. For the first time in 20 years, I love my job every single day."*

Now that he's helping people who are in the same position he was in not too long ago, Mark says "...it's not about money here; it's about making people happy... I've had people grab me and say thank you", he adds. This was never something he would hear as a contractor.

The first 'magic moment' came 3 weeks into the job when an 83-year-old lady whose home he had helped weatherize came up to him in tears and thanked him. He says that moment touched him so deeply that, when he got back to his truck, he had to stop for a minute because he almost cried, too.



It's been 6 months since Mark joined Salt Lake CAP, and he's had several 'magic moments' like the first one. He says that he remembers every single one of their faces and what they said to him and that he always will.

Mark gets calls from some of his previous customers, and he approaches those extra jobs completely differently. "It's not about the money anymore," he insists. Now he only charges for his labor and doesn't mark up the cost of supplies. People are astonished and also very grateful .

Mark says he sees his real future in Weatherization. He says he's had great opportunities to train and has improved on the skills he brought to the job when he came from the private sector. Mark's new goal: train more and become an energy auditor for the Weatherization Assistance Program.

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