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# MAKING A *DIFFERENCE* IN THE COMMUNITY: Cycle II of the Superfund Job Training Initiative in South Carolina



## INTRODUCTION

The Savannah River Site Superfund Job Training Initiative (SuperJTI) Cycle II is an environmental remediation job training program that provided career development opportunities for 42 trainees living near the Savannah River Nuclear Facility in south-central South Carolina. Cycle II is the second SuperJTI conducted at the Savannah River Site (SRS); in 2009, Cycle I provided career development opportunities for 20 trainees.

In 2010, through a partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), site contractor Savannah River Remediation, Denmark Technical College, The Imani Group and Allendale Department of Social Services, SRS SuperJTI Cycle II provided local job-seekers with new skills and work experience. EPA's goal is to help the community create job opportunities and partnerships that remain in place for the long term.

## CANDIDATE OUTREACH, RECRUITMENT AND SCREENING: MARCH 2010

SRS SuperJTI Cycle II staff and community partner The Imani Group distributed fliers and hosted orientation sessions to publicize the job training program and attract potential participants. Three hundred interested candidates attended the program's five orientation sessions in four surrounding communities: Allendale, Aiken and Barnwell counties in South Carolina and the City of Augusta in Georgia. Following these sessions, 281 people completed a preliminary testing stage and 204 of those participants were invited to attend the program's tryouts. Of those invitees, 173 participants decided to continue with the program tryouts.

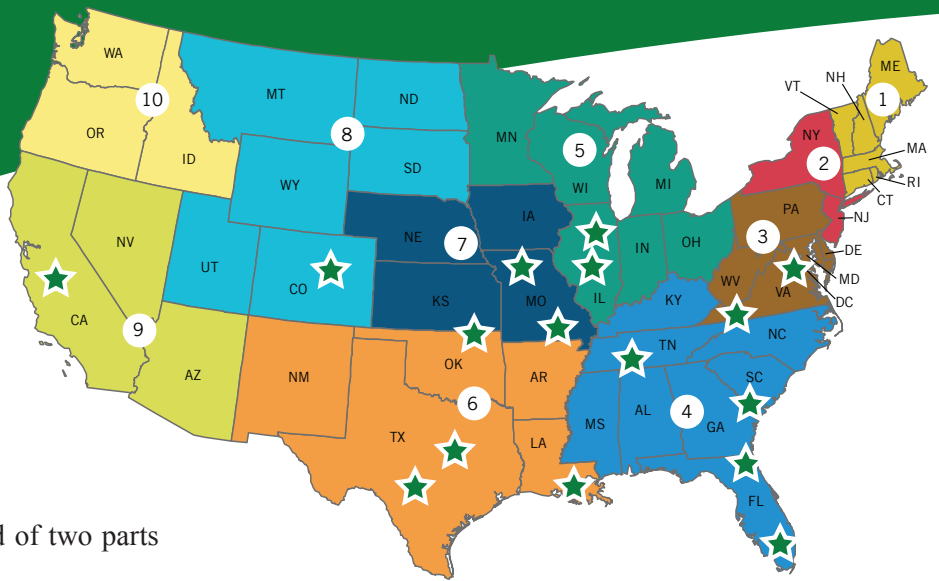
Program tryouts were conducted over two days and included leadership, team building and role-playing activities, basic physical fitness evaluation, and observation by a team of 25 evaluators representing the project's partners. Following the tryouts, 42 trainees were selected.



## SITE HISTORY

SRS is a 310-square mile former nuclear materials fabrication facility located adjacent to the Savannah River in Aiken and Barnwell counties, South Carolina. SRS operated from 1950 to 1988, producing primarily tritium and plutonium-239 in reactors built on site. These materials were used for the creation of nuclear weapons as well as for the space program and medical and industrial research. Past disposal practices of chemical and radioactive wastes led to soil and ground water contamination near SRS. Cleanup activities at the site have been ongoing since 1989. To date, more than 324 of the site's 515 waste areas have been closed. Other cleanup activities have included the treatment of billions of gallons of ground water. The site's cleanup is scheduled for completion in 2025.

While portions of SRS are in the cleanup phase, SRS is also still a functioning DOE facility. Over 14,000 people are currently employed at SRS by DOE and its contractors, making it one of the primary employers in the area. In 2003, SRS was selected as the location for three new plutonium facilities, for mixed oxide (MOX) fuel fabrication, pit disassembly and conversion, and plutonium immobilization. SRS is also home to the Savannah River National Laboratory.



SRS SuperJTI Cycle II is one of the many SuperJTI job training projects nationwide that are making a difference for underserved citizens living in communities affected by Superfund sites.

### TRAINING: MAY-JUNE 2010

The SRS SuperJTI Cycle II training consisted of two parts and took place over the course of eight weeks.

- **Pre-Employment and Lifeskills Training:** Trainees completed two weeks of courses that included cultural competency, money management, environmental justice and effective work habits. The training was provided by project staff and community partner The Imani Group.
- **Technical Training:** Trainees completed six weeks of classroom training that included physics, math, heat transfer, chemistry and fluid flow. The training was provided by project partner Denmark Technical College.

SRS SuperJTI Cycle II staff will conduct program follow-up with the graduates as well as their supervisors for one year following job placement. During this time period, graduates may change positions but are required to maintain employment, either with Savannah River Remediation or another employer.

Upon completion of the program, trainees possess the marketable skills needed to begin a successful career in environmental remediation and become valuable members of the community's workforce.



### JOB PLACEMENT AND FOLLOW-UP: JULY 2010 – JULY 2011

After graduation, trainees interviewed with project partner and site contractor Savannah River Remediation for available positions at SRS. Thirty-three graduates were placed immediately into permanent positions with full benefits as radiological control inspectors, radiological control auxiliary and nuclear production operators. Six graduates were placed into temporary positions as material handlers.

#### THE SRS SUPERJTI CYCLE II TRAINEES:

- **Include a significant number of women as well as men.** The trainees include 16 women and 26 men.
- **Live in geographically diverse areas.** The 42 trainees hail from the two states and seven counties surrounding SRS.
- **Include younger and older populations.** Twenty-three trainees are in their 20s and younger. Nineteen trainees are in their 30s or older.





# SRS SUPERJTI CYCLE II COMMUNITY PROFILES: Making a Difference

Teshania Bay



Teshania Bey found the permanent career path she was looking for in SRS SuperJTI. Teshania was working in a temporary position at SRS when she heard about the program from her mentor in human resources. It was her fourth contract in two years, and she was ready for a change. “The program was a way for me to pursue a permanent position at the site,” she said. After continuing with the rigorous selection process, Teshania was selected from a pool of 175 candidates as one of the program’s 42 trainees.

A mother of three, part-time student and cheerleading coach, Teshania traveled up to forty-five minutes to the training sites each day for the eight-week program. She graduated from the program in July 2010, and was hired as a General Production Operator by project partner Savannah River Remediation. In subsequent on-the-job training, Teshania feels that her SuperJTI classes in chemistry, math and physics at Denmark Technical College have been essential. “We had really great teachers. If it wasn’t for them, I would have been lost with the training I’m taking now,” she reflected. Now in a permanent position at SRS, Teshania has rewritten her career plan for the next 20 years. “I don’t have to worry about a job anymore because this is where I want to be,” she said.

In February 2010, Joseph Gaines was a recent college graduate struggling to find a job. He was living in Columbia, South Carolina, when his sister told him about the SRS SuperJTI information session being hosted in his hometown of Barnwell, South Carolina. He decided to attend the session and continue with the recruitment process. The next step was the program tryouts. When he arrived, Joseph was nervous but energized. “Overall, it was a rush because you only had a few minutes to impress the people who held your future in their hands,” he recalled. Those few minutes were enough, and Joseph was selected as a trainee. “I’m thankful that I was chosen,” he said.

During the eight weeks of training, Joseph made several friends in the program and the group grew into a cohesive unit affectionately called “The Village” by the trainees. Joseph said that the group’s supportive dynamics allowed for self-reflection as well. “It [the program] was a great way to learn about yourself,” he said. Joseph successfully completed the program and was hired as a General Production Operator by Savannah River Remediation. Looking forward, Joseph has plans to continue his education in the near future. Assisted by SRS’ tuition reimbursement program, he is interested in pursuing a Master’s Degree in Information Systems with a concentration in Computer Security Management.

Joseph Gaines



Evan Pontoo



Evan Pontoo took a leap of faith with SRS SuperJTI. An SRS veteran with over 20 years experience on site, Evan had been laid off from his job in graphic illustration in 2004. Since then, he had been working as a kitchen designer while applying for jobs at SRS. After learning about the program from his sister-in-law, Evan took a risk and quit his job to pursue the recruitment process. Following program tryouts, he was selected as a trainee. One month later, he was employed at SRS.

Evan was chosen by project partner Savannah River Remediation as one of a group of SuperJTI trainees who would exit the program early. After two weeks of Lifeskills training, Evan was hired and began over 600 hours of classroom training for his current position as a Radiological Control Inspector. This training will be followed by a year of shadowing a veteran inspector. Evan explained that the extensive training is necessary because the job is all about maintaining site safety. “We’re the safety monitors for everyone on site. We help make sure that nothing happens that could be hazardous to people’s health,” he said. “We have to be prepared for what could go wrong.” Overall, Evan has had a positive experience in the program, and is happy to be back working at SRS. “I don’t see how I could have returned [to working at SRS] without the program,” he said.

## What is the SuperJTI Program?

The Superfund Job Training Initiative, or SuperJTI, supports job training programs in communities affected by nearby Superfund sites and encourages the employment of trainees at local site cleanups. The SuperJTI program combines extensive classroom instruction with hands-on work experience for each participant. Upon completion of the program, each participant possesses the marketable skills required to become a valuable member of the community's workforce. EPA offers SuperJTI training through its Technical Assistance Services for Communities (TASC) contract at no cost to training participants.

For more information, please visit:

[www.epa.gov/superfund/community/sfjti](http://www.epa.gov/superfund/community/sfjti)



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1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
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