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



## INTRODUCTION

The Savannah River Site Superfund Job Training Initiative (SuperJTI) Cycle I is an environmental remediation job training program that provided career development opportunities for 20 trainees living near the Savannah River Site (SRS) in south-central South Carolina.

In 2009, through a partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), site contractor Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, Aiken Technical College and The Imani Group, SRS SuperJTI Cycle I 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: JANUARY 2009 – MAY 2009

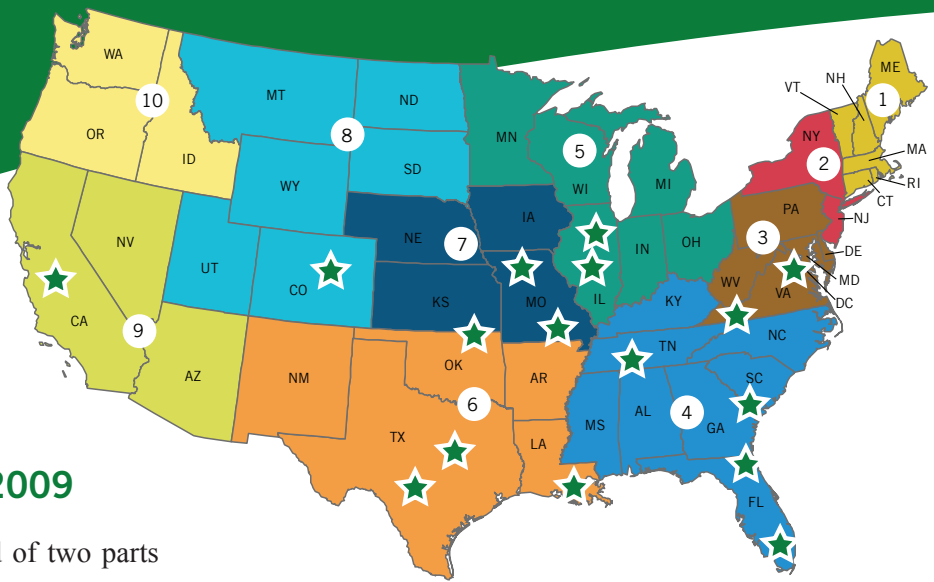
SRS SuperJTI Cycle I staff and community partner The Imani Group distributed fliers and hosted orientation sessions to publicize the job training program and attract potential participants. More than 350 interested candidates attended the program's five orientation sessions in several surrounding communities: Allendale, Aiken and Barnwell counties in South Carolina and Richmond County in Georgia. Following these sessions, almost 200 people completed a preliminary testing stage and 113 of those participants were invited to attend the program's tryouts. Of those invitees, 90 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 20 evaluators representing the project's partners. Following the tryouts, 20 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.



## TRAINING: JUNE 2009 – JULY 2009

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

- **Pre-Employment and Lifeskills Training:** Trainees completed two weeks of courses including 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 the 40-hour Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER) training as well as CPR and first aid training. They also completed courses in math, computer skills and valving. The training was provided by Aiken Technical College and the Aiken Red Cross.

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.

SRS SuperJTI Cycle I 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.



## JOB PLACEMENT AND FOLLOW-UP: AUGUST 2009 – AUGUST 2010

After graduation, trainees interviewed with project partner and site contractor Savannah River Nuclear Solutions for available positions. Sixteen graduates were placed into positions as nuclear production operators and material handlers.

SRS SuperJTI Cycle I staff conducted program follow-up with the graduates and their supervisors for one year following job placement. After one year of follow-up, all 16 graduates are employed, have received raises, and several have been promoted. In April 2010, the graduates met with EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson to discuss the program and working at SRS. All 16 are continuing employment with Savannah River Nuclear Solutions.

### THE SRS SUPERJTI CYCLE I TRAINEES:

- **Include a significant number of women as well as men.** The trainees include seven women and 13 men.
- **Live in geographically diverse areas.** The 20 trainees hail from the two states and five counties surrounding SRS.
- **Include primarily younger trainees.** Fifteen trainees are in their 20s. Five trainees are in their 30s or older.



# SRS SUPERJTI CYCLE I COMMUNITY PROFILES: Making a Difference

Leslie Hartley



Leslie Hartley was ready for a change. The former computer technician and coffee shop barista had been working odd jobs for two years, and was looking for a steady career path. He was in choir rehearsal in Aiken, South Carolina when he heard about SRS SuperJTI from project manager Tiffany Reed. After attending the initial orientation, Leslie found the program's physical fitness, role playing and leadership tryout activities exhilarating. "It was really a freeing experience, especially when you've been out of work and you tend to draw back a bit into a shell," he said. "If you allow yourself to be vulnerable and leave everything in the open, then that's when you've really won." Leslie was chosen as one of the program's 20 trainees.

Once enrolled in SRS SuperJTI, Leslie particularly enjoyed the Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response course taught at Aiken Technical College. "It was fantastic," he said. Now employed with Savannah River Nuclear Solutions as an Operator at SRS, the program's training has proved essential. In order to qualify as a K-Area Building Operator at SRS, Leslie trained for over 300 hours. But he isn't complaining. Looking back on SRS SuperJTI, Leslie said, "It has really been an amazing program. It has changed my life completely."

After hearing about SRS SuperJTI from her mother-in-law, Jessica McCain attended an orientation session and was impressed by the program. This certified phlebotomist had been unemployed for two years. Jessica knew that if she was accepted into the program, there was a possibility for a career at SRS, one of the most prestigious employers in the area. After continuing with the program's rigorous three-phase recruitment process, Jessica was selected as one of the program's trainees.

According to Jessica, SRS SuperJTI's two-week Lifeskills training changed her entire outlook. "It made me do a whole 180 with my life," she said. "Without it, I don't know if I would have been able to make the transition between being a person without a job to someone with a career." The training's application also extended beyond Jessica's professional life: "I became a better mother, a better family person. I don't know where I would be without it." After graduating from the program, Jessica was hired as a Production Trainee by Savannah River Nuclear Solutions. Jessica said that her favorite parts of employment at SRS are the work atmosphere and excellent benefits. "Being around the professionals at SRS, you learn something every day. It's very informative," she said. Jessica has high hopes for her future at SRS and plans to work there indefinitely.

Jessica McCain



Albert "Buddy" Broomfield



Buddy Broomfield, then a student at Denmark Technical College in Barnwell, South Carolina, learned about SRS SuperJTI's orientation sessions from his father. He decided to attend, passed the required testing, and continued to the program tryouts. Buddy found taking part in tryouts activities to be a lesson in teamwork. "The process was pretty interesting, because you're working with total strangers, and with each activity, you have to come together as one team," he reflected. Following two days of tryouts, Buddy was selected as a trainee.

A former mechanic and car detailer, Buddy found the technical training to be the most beneficial part of the program. He especially enjoyed the Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response course because it provided him with new skills and fostered group collaboration. Buddy successfully completed the program in July 2009, and is now employed as a Warehouse Material Handler for Savannah River Nuclear Solutions at SRS. Buddy appreciates that his job includes both computer and warehouse work. He also likes that the company's Human Resources Department is there to assist with his professional growth. "You actually have people there who will support you as you work in different positions," he said. Above all, Buddy is grateful for the chance to prove himself: "I can't say thank you enough for the opportunity."

## What is the SuperJTI Program?

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

The Superfund Job Training Initiative, or SuperJTI, supports job readiness 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.



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