

StraightTalk

A JOURNEY TO: Homeownership and Independence

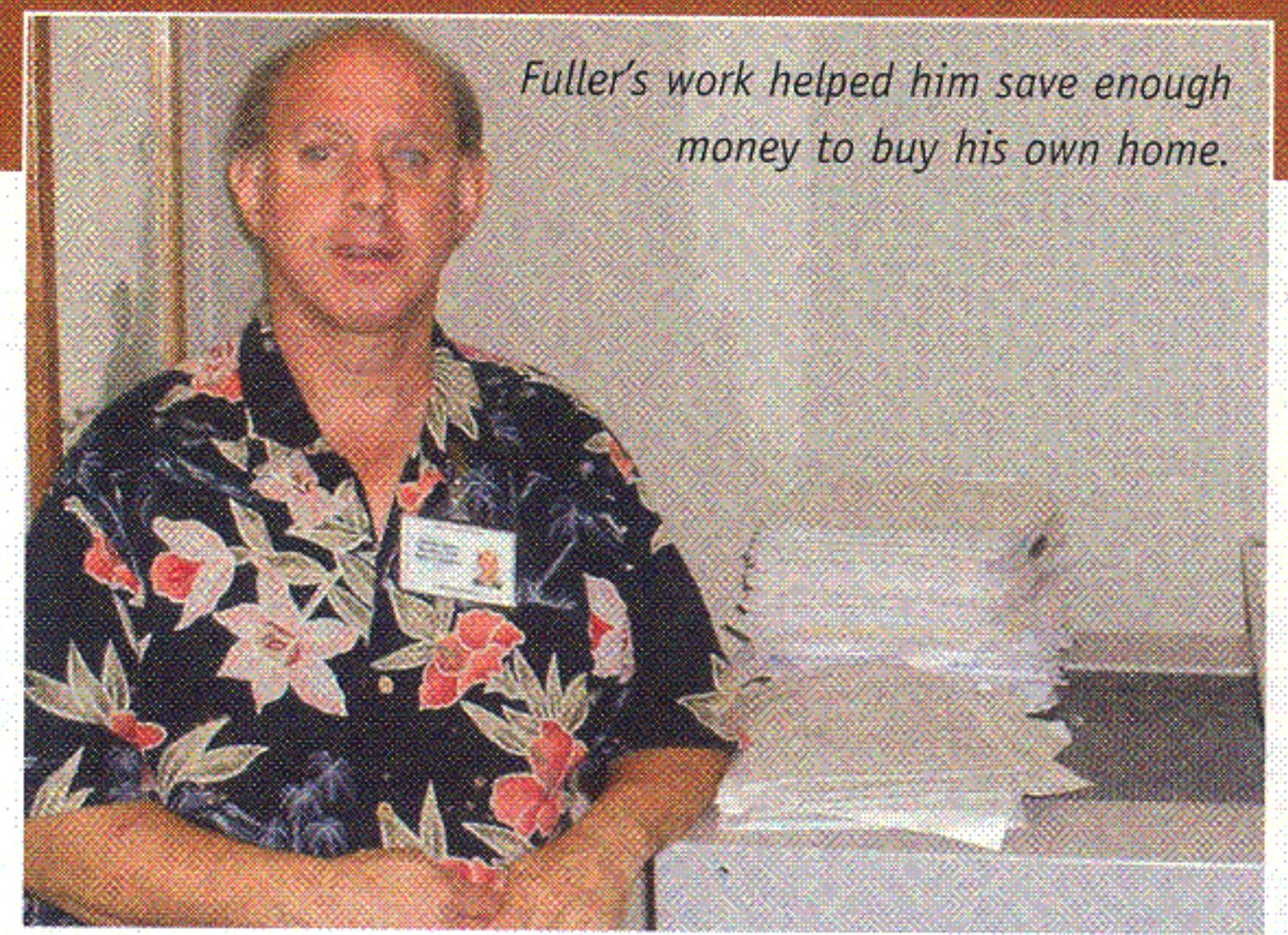
By Anthony Fuller

Four years ago this April, I bought my very first house, where I still live. Before that I had lived in an apartment or a group home. Seven years ago, on September 5, 2000, I started my job as a shredder technician. This decision led me to a path that enabled me to purchase my home. I remember it like it was yesterday.

I was born with a hearing impairment and with very little sight. Legally, I am blind. I do not like to be labeled, though. I feel I am very independent. Still, I know the challenges all too well of living in a "hearing" and "seeing" world. The system has not always treated me well. Back in the '60s when I was growing up, no one knew what to do with me. I've had to work very hard to get to where I am today.

With the guidance of my job coach, Liz Prioleau, Cobb-Douglas Community Services Board (Cobb CSB) and also a People First advocate, we, together, customized a job just for me. Liz has worked with me for the past seven years and works hard to always advocate for me. The harder I work and the more I can prove that I can do many things, the harder she seems to advocate for me.

Through Cobb CSB, I was able to receive a grant through Project Exceed to purchase a shredder. A Department of Labor grant, Project Exceed helps people with disabilities or substance abuse problems take advantage of customized employment services. They work very closely with CobbWorks, a center that provides job search, development and training services.



I started shredding documents for Cobb CSB and generally worked 20 hours a week, but occasionally worked 40. I have since contracted my services to other businesses such as Bank of America and CobbWorks and am always looking for more business. I also perform shredding services for the church and for my sister, who is a real estate agent. I find it very rewarding being self-employed. Before that I worked at various places such as Kmart, TJ Maxx and as a janitor at South Cobb High School.

After three years of working, saving money and the guidance of many other individuals, I decided to purchase my first home. Through a local program in Marietta, I received first time homebuyer's education

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so that I could understand the benefits of having and maintaining good credit. This program walked me through the process of purchasing a home.

Owning a home and being self-employed has given me more confidence to do other things, such as setting up my own support systems within the community. I take all my bills to Bank of America, where they write out each and every bill for me. I work closely with my doctors to keep track of my medications. These are all things I have set up for myself in order to be more independent. Also, in the next six months, I hope to establish a business plan. I am ready to move forward in my career.

Cobb CSB has not only allowed me to become a productive citizen – on my own terms – but has allowed me to grow as a person. The only other thing that would make me complete is to have a companion to share it all with.

For more information on Anthony's shredding services, please contact Liz Prioleau at 770.337.8317. ●