

# Employees

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ment to help the deaf deepened after a couple of experiences with Lockhart.

He noticed that waitresses at restaurants appeared uneasy serving them because Lockhart is deaf and they used sign language.

Thompson also found that people would ask him questions that were directed at Lockhart without first attempting to communicate with Lockhart through gestures or written notes.

At first, other Parks and Recreation employees were concerned about whether they would be able to communicate with Lockhart, and felt that he needed to be protected.

"There was a lot of apprehension," Thompson said. "I just didn't know to begin with. I had a great fear, as everyone does. We didn't know what to expect."

But those worries disappeared as Lockhart and the other workers learned to communicate with one another, even though Lockhart

cannot hear and does not use his voice. They have forged a working relationship through patience and gestures.

Encouraged by their success, Miss Vitullo said she wants to help more deaf and hearing-impaired people to find jobs.

She held a deaf-awareness workshop in Winchester recently, and hopes to teach a class this fall. She especially wants employers to attend.

Miss Vitullo also wants to form a Winchester chapter of the Virginia Association of the Deaf as a local support group for the deaf and hearing-impaired.

"I feel really fortunate knowing sign language.

"Everyone is going to lose some of their hearing later in life. . . . I look at people as temporarily able-bodied. Everybody is going to experience some kind of condition that handicaps them in the future."