

Helping Young Adults Secure Skilled, Highly Competitive Jobs in California's Central Valley

THE CHALLENGE

Wonderful owns and manages nearly 10 million sq. ft. of commercial real estate, primarily in California, directly creating over 10,000 jobs and counting. Built to transform the Central Valley's economic future, the Wonderful Industrial Park is a state-of-the-art logistics complex located in Shafter, west of Bakersfield, serving multiple Fortune 100 tenants, supporting goods movement throughout the entire western U.S., and operating with a cleaner, more sustainable, community-first approach than virtually any other industrial park in the nation.

For young adults in and around Shafter, California, skilled jobs are hard to find. The labor market is extremely competitive; in-demand roles typically require several years of experience or a certificate of competency. So, aspiring forklift operators aged 18-25, who don't yet have either, face significant barriers to securing the jobs they want.

ABOUT THE WONDERFUL COMPANY

One of the largest privately held companies in the U.S., The Wonderful Company (Wonderful) is a \$6 billion global enterprise employing more than 10,000 people across California's Central Valley, Fiji, and the world. Co-owned by Lynda and Stewart Resnick, Wonderful grows, bottles, packages, and markets an extensive portfolio of iconic global brands, including FIJI Water, POM Wonderful, Wonderful Pistachios, Wonderful Halos, JUSTIN, Lewis Cellars, and Landmark wines.

THE SOLUTION

Located at the Wonderful Industrial Park, the Wonderful Career Center's technical training team hosts free programs accessible to employees of the company, tenants at the park, and the wider community. The goal is to develop young adults' skill sets and equip them for fulfilling careers, including on forklifts.

In partnership with nearby Bakersfield College, the programs provide successful trainees with a formal qualification with which to apply for jobs, as well as the knowledge they need to hit the ground running.

With the two simulators, Cindy and her team have given the local community a way to develop their forklift skills in a safe, engaging environment, guided by experienced trainers on programs typically lasting around 20 hours. Although programs tend to include two full days of training and one half-day of assessments, the simulators allow students to learn at their own pace and take as long as they need.

“The simulator does a good job of simulating what a forklift would feel like. Any nervousness that [the students] might have had are relieved because they already know more or less what to expect once they get on the real forklift.”

- Cindy Palacios - Associate Director of Technical Training - Wonderful Career Center -

CINDY'S TESTIMONIAL

“Understanding the need for more skilled job candidates, we initiated the Powered Industrial Truck program in 2023 to be free for residents to join and grow their career potential. Through our partnership with Bakersfield College, we acquired a Sit-down Counterbalance and a Stand-up Desktop Simulator to help trainees gain the knowledge they need to be successful forklift operators.”

“Young people nowadays tend to learn very well on this type of game-like simulation. So, it's been very appealing to the demographic of students that we get through the programs. They feel like they're just getting their toes wet before they dive into the pool.”



At the Wonderful Career Center

THE RESULTS

Cindy shares the story of a student who initially lacked forklift experience and confidence. Despite struggling on the virtual simulators, she took the initiative to ask for extra practice before moving to the real forklift. After spending additional time on the simulator, she gained confidence and, when ready, excelled in the hands-on training. Her determination paid off as she earned her certificate from Bakersfield College and secured a higher position with a partner company. Cindy notes that this transformation is something she has witnessed with many students, repeatedly seeing them succeed through perseverance.

CONCLUSIONS

Since the program's inception, The Wonderful Career Center has trained around **50 local residents**, providing them with a formal certificate of competency in skilled forklift operations. Many of these individuals have gone on to secure full-time employment as forklift operators, jobs that would have otherwise been out of reach. Cindy credits the program's success not only to the thoroughness of the training but also to the career placement resources provided by the Wonderful Career Center, which support students in finding stable, well-paying positions in the industry.

Learn more about The Wonderful Company and Bakersfield College collaboration in [this video](#).



DEVELOP CONFIDENCE

The confidence built in VR helps to quickly transition to the forklift



INCREASE SKILL LEVEL

Make mistakes in VR and learn from them



REDUCED BARRIERS OF ENTRY

With confidence and skill, break the barriers of entry