

In 2016, when Kenneth came to Workshops, two things were obvious: He had a huge, infectious smile, and he was determined. His life has changed a lot in the 4 years since then, but those two things remain constant.

Kenneth had built a successful, lucrative business when he was younger. Unfortunately, it was also illegal. During one business deal gone bad, Kenneth was shot 14 times, resulting in having an arm amputated from the elbow down. A second and even more consequential event was his arrest and incarceration for drug dealing.

His determination kicked in while he was in federal prison. He had time to think about his life. He thought of his 2 daughters, both under age 10 at the time, and how they needed him to be there for them. He thought of his mother, who had stood by him, loved him, and wanted to see him turn his life around. She told him, "If you can wake up every morning and put your mindset to do something negative, then you can wake up every morning and put your mindset to do something positive."

By the time Kenneth was released to a half-way house and on parole in 2016, he was determined to use his skills to build a legitimate business. He turned to Workshops, Inc. to help him reach that goal. He went through Job Readiness classes and worked in production doing handwork for business customers. Kathy Dunn, Production Manager, remembers him as being a great worker, and always with that big smile on his face.

He needed all the determination he could muster to make the next move, from Workshops, Inc. to competitive employment. Director of Programs Nathalie Brasher worked with him, picking him up and taking him to interviews, working with potential employers to overcome his criminal history and his disability. "It was hard to find someone to give him a chance." Nathalie and Kenneth bonded during this time, and that bond has lasted through the years. Through his first job driving a fork lift – a job Nathalie helped him secure. Through the tough times when his car broke down, leading him to sell it, buy another, and then started car-trading, using the wholesale auto dealer's license he purchased with his first-ever income tax refund.

Kenneth stops by to see Nathalie when he's in Workshops' neighborhood and recently stopped by to share the good news that he now has his own business: Upper Echelon Used Cars on Pinson Valley Parkway. He is proud that he's taken his determination and turned it into his own business. The grand opening will be in January, 2021.

"My immediate family life is just amazing. I still some days don't believe I turn the key to my own office." Workshops is proud to be part of Kenneth's success story, and we are thankful for the opportunity – with your support – to make a meaningful difference in the lives of so many people who face barriers to achieving their vocational potential!

Pictured:

Kenneth and his mother in front of Upper Echelon Used Cars on Pinson Valley Parkway