Workers Source Vancouver finds 'perfect fit' for employers, employees

By ALITA BOWDERS

First Aid Only was a match made in HR heaven.

First Aid Only needed employees, fast.
A group of laid-off Vietnamese workers needed jobs.

They're together now, thanks to the efforts of WorkSource, a partnership between state, local and private entities that handle workforce development and employment services in Washington.

It's been a little more than two years since 28 Vietnamese workers at RWI lost their jobs when the company closed its doors.

The owner, a Vietnamese worker at WorkSource branch in Graham, Ore. When it became evident that many of the displaced workers lived in Vancouver, the case crossed state lines.

Most spoke little or no English, but were interested in what WorkSource had to offer, said Beth Kennedy, then business services manager for WorkSource.

"We actually were sitting in a team meeting talking about this very situation," said to the staff. "Wouldn't it be great if we could find an employer who could take in this entire group on all at once?"

And that was how Vancouver's First Aid Only came into the picture.

Big need

First Aid Only, which produces first aid and emergency preparedness kits and supplies, had just landed a contract to assemble large first aid kits for Costco.

The kits initially needed between 40 to 60 people to build them, said Kathy Nein, human resources manager. But First Aid Only had trouble getting — and keeping — enough employees.

"Attendance was a huge issue," Nein said.

"There are a lot of people in this area that seem to want to work but are not crazy about assembly and production. We had a large turnover at first, and then we find this group of people."

Hammer said they laid out what they could offer First Aid Only, reimbursement for some training costs, a Vietnamese interpreter to help with daily training, new employee orientation and the first few days of work. All at no cost to the employer.

Lynn Miller, recruiting specialist and wife of First Aid Only owner Mark Miller, was not stranger to WorkSource or non-English-speaking employees.

Miller started at the company in 1989 and worked with WorkSource back then.

"That's when we first started hiring immigrants from Russia," she said. "When WorkSource called about the Vietnamese group, she added: "we said we'd do all that we could."

So all that was left was to see if the workers were on board with the plan. Hammer said First Aid Only invited the group to watch a video of what the company did and asked if they were interested.

"Funnier thing it was the first time I had people stand up and applaud," she said.

Next up was a tour of First Aid Only's facility for those interested in a job. A conversation gave a glimpse into the type of workers the company might be getting.

The plant manager was talking to one of the Vietnamese workers who spoke a bit of English. The manager asked about production at RWI and what happened when employees did not meet production numbers. The person didn't understand the question — missing a quota was an alien concept.

"That is one of the things that indicates to an employer that these are some pretty stellar staff," Miller said. "What a work ethic."

Breaking language barrier

Miller said each employee got 416 hours of training and picked up his or her new duties quickly.

"I would say in a week or two, they had it down pat," Miller said. "They learn really fast." Because employees are required to rotate through multiple stations, learning English is very important.

WorkSource helped the company get a simultaneous interpretation device. During staff meetings, groups are separated by language with a bilingual lead at each one to offer instantaneous translations. At the meetings, whoever wants a translation device gets one, Miller said.

And Clark College, one of WorkSource's partners, agreed to offer First Aid Only to pay an instructor to come down to the business and hold ESL classes for its workers. These classes are free.

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Businesses pinched by economy squeeze salaries of new hires

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By ALITA BOWDERS
Cashing out your car: Tips on consignment

Consumer: I'm planning on selling my car and considering consigning it to a dealer. Any suggestions for how to get a fair deal?

Ask the AG: As the economy slides, more consumers are selling possessions they're no longer using. When looking to consign anything of yours that is being sold, it's important to know the value of the vehicle, always put the deal in writing.

Why Car Consignments Work:
When you consign a car, the dealer will ask you how much you'd be willing to sell it for. If the price is less than the dealer's price, they'll return the car to you. If not, they'll keep it for a fee, which usually includes the sale price and any fees associated with the transaction. This allows you to earn more on your vehicle at a lower cost than you would have otherwise.

Questions to ask:
1. Ask the dealer about their experience in selling cars. Have they had success in getting your car sold in the past?
2. Ask the dealer if they have any information on the value of your car.
3. Ask the dealer if they have any information on financing options.
4. Ask the dealer if they have any information on the process of selling the car.

Delta lays out new plans for its frequent flier program

Delta Air Lines said on Thursday it will adopt a popular feature of Northwest's frequent flier program, as it plans to merge the two reward programs by the end of 2009.
Delta will allow its travelers to qualify for elite status by flying a certain number of segments, in addition to flying enough miles. The new rules will apply to all Delta flights.