

WORKPLACE MATTERS

Program pays employers to train new workers

Even in this economic downturn, companies continue to innovate, create new processes, implement new technologies and develop new staffing patterns.



**Eileen
Marcroft-
George**

The 10-year projections recently released by the Oregon Employment Department's Workforce and Economic Research Division indicate that Oregon companies anticipate filling 55,000 vacancies in the next year.

Unfortunately, for people who have been out of work for months, that means the skills they have may not fit the jobs that are open. Indeed, with the unemployment rate consistently lingering at 9.5 percent in Oregon and Lane County, the job market is saturated with job seekers.

But many have outdated-skills or lack industry specific skills needed to compete in the job market.

Through its on-the-job training program, Lane Workforce Partnership offers an innovative solution, where employers are reimbursed for hiring and training a job seeker.

Known as "hire first," it creates a win-win for employers and job seekers, by reimbursing employers up to \$5,000 in training costs so that employees can learn specific skills.

The on-the-job program "was a great benefit to us," said Miguel Bustamante, director of human resources at the Hilton Eugene & Conference Center. "We had an opportunity to hire and train someone who might not otherwise qualify for the position, and we also received a financial benefit through the program to cover ... training."

This program affords employers with other services:

- ◆ Help in writing a thorough job description.
- ◆ Access to current local wage information.

- ◆ Availability to promote job openings to hundreds of applicants.

- ◆ Screening of applicants to find the right match based on criteria defined by the employer.

- ◆ Skill assessments of applicants in math, reading, typing and computer skills, etc.

- ◆ Rooms for conducting interviews at WorkSource Lane.

- ◆ Help in writing a training plan.

- ◆ Processing paperwork required for timely payment reimbursement.

Working with more than 20 local employers, Lane Workforce Partnership placed 33 unemployed people in on-the-job training positions between July 1, 2010, and June 30, 2011.

Encouraged by the success of this program and others like it around the state, Gov. John Kitzhaber invested state funds for a job-creation initiative called Back to Work Oregon. Its goal is to find jobs for 1,325 unemployed Oregonians in one year using on-the-job training.

With additional funding from the governor's Back to Work Oregon initiative, Lane Workforce Partnership expanded its on-the-job training program to serve an additional 80 job seekers by the end of next June.

Many Lane County employers use the program for their hiring needs, and new ones sign up every day.

"On-the-job training really helped us become more effective in our hiring and recruiting," said Steve Cary, vice president, Feeney Wireless. "We hired five people through on-the-job training for positions in accounting, engineering and sales, and are very pleased with the individuals that have come through this program."

To join the program, go to www.laneworkforce.org or call 541-682-7200.

Eileen Marcroft-George is the workforce development manager at Lane Workforce Partnership.