

Worker Shortage Impacts Bend Businesses

by K_Guice

When Chad and Stephanie Zirkle opened their business, Dealin'™ In Signs, they had no idea it would boom so quickly. They also didn't realize how hard it would be to find employees when they were ready to grow.

However, like many businesses around the city they are feeling the growing pains of finding qualified applicants even though they are offering a competitive salary and willing to train. "We've talked to a couple employment offices, temporary agencies, placed ads," Chad said.

The end result, they have had one applicant in the past week. Mike Schmidt, the president and CEO of the Bend Chamber of Commerce, says the Zirkles are not alone. "We are hearing this from every sector," he said. "Finding quality workers, even workers that aren't qualified is a real hassle."

Deschutes County's unemployment rate in May and June was 4.2 percent. Last June it was 1 percent higher. "We believe we are at full employment," Schmidt added. "Anyone who wants a job, can get one."

Long term, Schmidt does not foresee things getting any better and Bend isn't alone. When Schmidt attended a conference in Washington D.C. with the Workforce Investment Board, the Department of Labor reported there was a three million shortage of workers in the country. "They predicted a 10 million worker shortage by the end of this decade," he added.

"People are having to either get creative or having to downsize their business plans," Schmidt said. The Zirkles say that is the very dilemma they are facing.

"We have more work than we can handle," Chad said. "It seems like we are at a crossroads. We

either blow up and expand or have to be really choosy about the jobs that we take, which we don't want to do.

So, the couple is continuing to spread the word through friends and looking to take out more ads. "We are offering \$8-\$14 and are willing to train." He said. "People with experience we are willing to pay a little more."

In a Bend Chamber of Commerce Weekly E-News, members shared ideas on what they were doing to attract new workers.

One member wrote in with the following; "As a Sunriver vacation rental and real estate company, we have started transporting qualified housekeeping staff daily in a 15-passenger van from Bend and as far as Madras. We have also been offering \$20 gas cards to our housekeeping staff every few weeks to help with the ever-rising cost of fuel. And, we have raised base salaries by approximately 7.7 percent."

The Bend Chamber of Commerce says as the city grows, more businesses come in and so do the complaints that there is a lack of workers, even white-collar workers.

In response, Schmidt says people are going beyond the bounds of Bend. "We are hearing people looking more to outsourcing some of their work to places like India. There they can get technical assistance 24 hours a day where there just isn't that workforce for that here," he said.

"Others are looking at job fairs in other parts of the country and other parts of the state to recruit people into the area," Schmidt added.

For the Zirkles, they say they will continue to handle the work load the best they can and continue looking for ways to reach out to potential employees. “There’s got to be people out there,” Chad said.

For people who have questions about hiring obstacles and are looking for guidance, Schmidt invites them to contact the Bend Chamber of Commerce at 382-3221.

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