

Resources make hunt for workers easier

THE CHAMBER VIEW

by Pamela Tumpap



Struggling to fill vacant positions in this tight labor market? Finding qualified employees has become quite a task, especially since Hawaii had the second-lowest rate of unemployment in the nation this past April, at 2.4 per-

cent. The latter rate of unemployment was just slightly above Montana's jobless rate of 2.2 percent, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

However, Maui's April unemployment rate of 2.1 percent — the lowest unemployment in our state for the month, according to the State of Hawaii Department of Labor & Industrial Relations (DLIR) — even beat Montana's.

Our extremely low unemployment is wreaking havoc on businesses under pressure to maintain operations or expand their busi-

ness. As reported at the Maui Chamber of Commerce Economic Update & SBA Awards Luncheon in April, David Todani of American Savings Bank noted that Maui's low unemployment is hampering the ability to expand. It is causing businesses to explore alternative options to find capable employees.

Thankfully, a number of resources are available to help.

The state DLIR offers several programs:

- Hire Net Hawaii is an online database where employers can post vacant positions and find suitable candidates, analyze the labor market, determine competitive starting salaries, and locate appropriate education, and training programs and providers. Hire Net Hawaii provides employers with a free and easy way to promote their job openings online and review potential candidates interested in a position by reviewing the resumes of candidates who have the qualifications for the posted position. Individuals looking for employment register to participate with the site and view job postings. They also can receive career guidance, resume or letter-writing assistance, and information on training/education programs, benefits or employers.

- SEE Hawaii Work is an innovative service that helps Hawaii businesses meet their growing labor demands and provides work opportunities for recipients of government financial assistance. SEE Hawaii Work is a new program to assist employers with their recruiting needs. After employers advertise openings with

the SEE program, a SEE employment specialist will contact the employer to discuss the specific qualifications, skills and qualities of the job. The SEE program then sends pre-screened applicants to the employer to interview. SEE applicants are available for immediate hire for part-time or full-time positions, ranging between 24 and 40 hours per week.

Employers wishing to take advantage of this program and hire a SEE applicant will be reimbursed for the current minimum wage, for up to 40 hours per week, and an additional 14 percent to assist with other costs, such as unemployment insurance, workers' compensation and FICA for an average of six months, while the employee learns the job. Further, medical benefits for the employee are covered by the program during this time. Employee and employer support also is provided by a SEE staff member to assist the employee in learning the position and ensure that the employer's needs are being met. It's a great way for employers to find suitable applicants to meet their needs, while saving on business recruitment costs and decreasing employment costs as the employee learns the job.

Other employment resource programs include:

- Hawaii Heroes Program, a state initiative providing Guardsmen an opportunity to compete for jobs with Guard-friendly employers. Employers interested in participating in the program and posting available jobs easily can do so online.

To learn more about these programs or to register to take advan-

tage of them, visit the DLIR Web site at www.hirenethawaii.com.

- Kama'aina Careers, a notable program founded in 1998 by Jon Sakurai-Horita, who grew up in Hilo and graduated from Hilo High School. He directed the Career Centers at Santa Clara University and the University of San Francisco, and has more than 20 years of experience assisting employers with their employment needs. He has contracted with a number of organizations on the Mainland to assist Hawaii companies in hiring Hawaii students from Mainland colleges and universities, and to bring Hawaii students and former residents working on the Mainland home to fulfill their career objectives here after academic training on the Mainland. To learn more, visit www.kamaaina-careers.com.

With this new employment paradigm, you might want to consider changing out those stale position ads for ads that excite prospective employees by letting them know: how they can make a difference with your organization; that you value and care about your employees; that you reward talented, hardworking individuals; and about opportunities ahead. Help them see possibilities with your company and inspire them to join your team.

Due to the abundant supply of position openings and choices, the hunt for great employees is on. But don't despair; resources are available to help, and the graduation season is upon us.

■ Pamela Tumpap is president of the Maui Chamber of Commerce.