

Workplace Diversity – Whose Dream is it Anyway?

As I write this column, my children are enjoying a holiday, courtesy of legendary civil rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King's fight to end racial inequality ended with his 1968 assassination, but his dream lives on.

Ten years after Martin Luther King, Jr. Day was officially celebrated in all 50 states, and under the leadership of our country's first black president, we stand a nation changed. Our issues of workplace diversity still persist, but they have broadened in variety and scope. Contemporary targets of employee discrimination include gender bias, sexual orientation and people with disabilities, among others.

According to Tom Capato, CEO, GettingHired.com, the largest disability employment portal in the US, the most recent figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate there are over 22 million Americans of working age who are not currently employed, many of whom are qualified and eager to enter the workforce given the opportunity by employers.

"We recently celebrated our one-year anniversary," says Capato. "While we are delighted with our progress, we cannot deny the continued growth in unemployment and, in particular, the widening participation gap for people with disabilities. Our mission is to lead the effort in reducing this gap by connecting qualified people with disabilities to employers and jobs," added Capato.

On a local level, according to the US Census Bureau's 2007 American Community Survey, the rate of unemployed disabled people in Putnam County is almost twice the rate of non-disabled people.

Much of this disparity is attributed to stigmas that exist and employers fear. However, studies continue to dispel these stigmas over and over again. For example:

- Employers are sometimes concerned about productivity of workers with disabilities and the costs associated with accommodations. A three-year DePaul University Study found "workers with disabilities performed as well as other workers while requiring about the same amount of supervision and minimal accommodations."

- The same study also reported that retail workers with disabilities had fewer absences than employees without disabilities.

- According to a National Survey of

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policy threatens Carmel's vistas and forested landscape. Each of the developments listed above occur on steep slopes of grade of more than 25 percent, require massive destruction of forests, and blasting of bedrock. That is what is left of Carmel to build upon. Together with a blasting code, it is essential to adopt a ridge line protection law, steep slope control, and more stringent tree preservation.

Remember Supervisor Schmitt, your constituents have rights and you are sworn to uphold them.

Ann Fanizzi, Chair
Putnam County Coalition to Preserve Open Space

Letters Policy

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Consumer Attitudes toward Companies that Hire People with Disabilities, 92 percent of the American public view companies that hire people with disabilities more favorably than those that do not. 87 percent of the public would prefer to give their business to companies that hire people with disabilities.

Spotlight: Nancy Burkley, communications and outreach coordinator, CAREERS for People with Disabilities, 45 Fair Street, Carmel

In Putnam County, Careers for People with Disabilities helps individuals with disabilities find and keep jobs by providing training and on-going support. They also work with businesses that are interested in employing people with disabilities.

"There are so many good reasons for employers to consider this uniquely diverse workforce," says Nancy Burkley, CAREERS for People with Disabilities. "People with disabilities have proven to be incredibly dedicated and reliable workers. In fact, fewer than 1 percent of CAREERS' clients have been laid off in the past year while the unemployment rate overall has been 8 to 10 percent," adds Burkley.

If that's not enough, the government provides attractive tax credits and monetary give-backs to incent employers, including Work Opportunity Tax Credits, Work Try-Out and the On-the-job Training Monetary Incentive Program. Visit the US Department of Labor website for more information.

Hannaford Supermarkets is a longtime

supporter of people with disabilities. According to Mike Norton, a Hannaford corporate spokesman, the company is committed to a culture where differences are accepted, valued and used to enhance the business and support the organization. "To assist these efforts, we work with local agencies throughout our coverage area, including Putnam County, to cultivate and develop opportunities for people with disabilities," said Norton.

According to Burkley, in addition to Hannaford, there are a number of progressive companies in the Putnam area that regularly hire CAREERS' clients, including the A&P Supermarket, Carmel Cineplex, Putnam Hospital Center and The Plaza at Clover Lake, a residence for independent senior living.

For more information about CAREERS for People with Disabilities, visit the website at www.careersforpeoplewithdisabilities.org.

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