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Governor's Budget Continues Support for Transitional Jobs Program; Local Businesses Benefit

MADISON, WI— Small businesses are the largest employer in Wisconsin, but the current economic uncertainty is causing small businesses to be hesitant to hire new employees.

Eco-Latch Systems, LLC, a startup company based around owner Jack Wilson's eco-friendly packaging invention, the Box Latch; and McClure Wood Finishing, a small woodworking business owned and operated by Mike McClure are two small businesses in Jefferson, Wisconsin that were looking to increase their productivity and efficiency, but were unsure of the financial risk of taking on a new employee.

Transitional Jobs is one program in the area that is helping businesses find the ideal solution to take on new employees without having to shoulder the costs or time-consuming paperwork of hiring. The program gives businesses the opportunity to help dislocated or unemployed workers re-enter the workforce by subsidizing full-time employment for participants for up to six months while they learn new job skills and gain valuable work experience. The Transitional Jobs program provides eligible participants with an immediate income as well as job training and work experience that the local labor market demands.

Wilson and McClure have teamed up to work with Transitional Jobs participant Brock Folts in order to expand their operations while giving Folts the opportunity to gain full-time work experience as well as training in woodworking, manufacturing, and shipping.

Folts, a dislocated worker in his 20s, had been laid off from his manufacturing job and had been struggling with unemployment for over half a year when he heard about the Transitional Jobs program. Looking for a way to get back into the workforce and find the financial means to support his 11-month-old daughter, he signed up and quickly found the full-time employment he was seeking.

"It definitely makes you feel better about yourself to finally get a job after six months," Folts said. "After being unemployed for six months you'd think no one would wanna hire you because you've been out of work for so long...I'm trying not to take [this opportunity] for granted."

Through Transitional Jobs, Folts is working the equivalent of a full-time job by splitting his days between Eco-Latch Systems, LLC and McClure Wood Finishing. With his help, the two companies have been able to increase their production while maintaining the streamlined cost efficiency that small businesses require.

“Production is up for us since he’s been here,” McClure said. “There’s a lot of tasks that I can pass off to Brock and he gets to learn them,” he continued, extolling the fact that he can go out on customer calls while Folts remains in the shop working on products—a feat that could never have been accomplished before he took on an extra employee.

Wilson is also grateful for the extra help Transitional Jobs has given him in getting his business up and running. A new company that began in May 2010, Eco-Latch Systems, LLC is still in the patent-writing and production prototyping phase, which leaves a large amount of basic but tedious tasks to be done.

“One of the things that happens with a small business is that, if you’re not doing it [yourself], it doesn’t get done.” Wilson stated.

Wilson appreciates that now he can devote his time to the big-picture business development while delegating the more time-consuming daily operations to Folts.

Wilson also said that, because the wages are subsidized, taking on a Transitional Jobs participant was an extremely cost-effective way for his startup company to get off the ground. McClure enthusiastically agreed, adding that while his company has been in need of an extra worker for some time now, the business has not had the funds or legal know-how to hire a permanent employee.

Small business owners such as McClure and Wilson appreciate the lack of paperwork and time involved in taking on a Transitional Jobs employee.

Working for the program has also been a great career opportunity for Folts. His employers have noticed a remarkable change in his skills, job performance, and work ethic since he started working for them, commenting that Folts has improved in everything from showing up to work on time to communicating in a professional manner.

After six months of work experience and training through Transitional Jobs, Folts will be in a far stronger position to find permanent employment. Working in a hands-on job at McClure Wood Finishing has opened his eyes to a new career path, and after completing his temporary job, he is looking to go back to school for an associate’s degree in cabinetmaking or woodworking with the ultimate goal of starting his own business.

Wilson believes that small or startup businesses are an ideal partner for working with the Transitional Jobs program because these companies have the most need of any extra help they can get in running the daily operations of a business, and are most wary of the financial commitment and risk involved in hiring new employees.

The Transitional Jobs program was developed by the [State of Wisconsin Department of Children and Families](#) and is funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. All Transitional Jobs participants are recruited, screened, and hired by the Workforce Development Board of South Central Wisconsin and are placed at participating worksites.

Businesses interested in participating in the program should visit www.wdbscw.org or call the Workforce Development Board of South Central Wisconsin at (608) 249-9001.

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