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April 28, 2013

State Agency Helps Employers Match Applicants, Jobs

By Luis Duran, Functional Site Manager, New Mexico Workforce Connection, Santa Fe office

Rose Marie Law first used the employment screening services of the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions even before she became director of human resources for Jemez Mountain Electrical Co-op, a nonprofit utility started in 1947 to serve residents of Jemez Springs and now generating electrical power for Rio Arriba, Santa Fe, San Juan, McKinley and Sandoval counties.



While the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Union Local 611 provides journeyman electricians through its apprenticeship program, Law is responsible for hiring clerical and warehouse workers for the utility's offices in Jemez Springs, Cuba and Española.

When jobs come open at the utility, the Department of Workforce Solutions helps Law assess the skills and abilities of her top candidates with a WorkKeys test. The assessment distills the lists of finalists to those who have the problem-solving abilities, math skills and work habits required in the open jobs.

The result, Law said, has been a better match of candidates to jobs and less remedial training of new employees. The free service is available to companies of all sizes — for-profit and nonprofit — but is especially useful to small businesses that don't have the recruitment resources of large corporations and government employers.

How it works

While a résumé summarizes an applicant's training and work experience, it doesn't give the complete picture. The WorkKeys assessment, Law said, "gives more insight into what their work ethics are and how they handle tasks."

WorkKeys assessments test applicants on basic skills essential to all jobs, such as reading, math and an ability to be resourceful — to know where to find accurate information and obtain answers to questions. The department works with employers to measure more specific skills required by some jobs, and the test can be calibrated to evaluate the potential of existing employees to advance to higher-level positions.

Laws sends applicants for testing after placing an ad, sifting through résumés and interviewing finalists who seem like potential matches. During the daylong test, applicants are scored on core abilities, and employers can use these scores to narrow the candidate list before doing background checks.

Candidates who complete the testing qualify for a Career Readiness Certificate that confirms their skills, even if they don't land the first job they test for.

While she hasn't computed the savings, Law is certain the utility has conserved time and money not having to train workers whose skills aren't what they appeared to be on paper and has minimized the type of turnover costs that result when employees and jobs are bad fits.

Multiple services

WorkKeys assessments are among the many services offered at the New Mexico Workforce Connection's 23 statewide offices and on the website.

Employers can post open jobs on the site at no cost and learn about incentives for making their workplaces accessible to disabled customers and employees (Disabled Access Tax Incentives) and tax credits they can claim for hiring residents of an empowerment zone (Empowerment Zone Employment Credit) or applicants who are veterans, ex-felons or recipients of public assistance (Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program).

For more information and a list of statewide offices, visit the New Mexico Workforce Connection at www.dws.state.nm.us.

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