

Matching people with right jobs

BY JOHN SEELMEYER

A personality profile of a community's workforce, a project that's believed to be the first of its kind, provides a new tool in the effort to locate employers at Hawthorne.

The profile shows, for instance, that the workforce in the Mineral County community includes relatively large numbers of people who are introverted and good at following rules — potentially good employees, in other words, for light manufacturers.

The workforce also includes a large number of folks whose personalities would fit well with jobs in retirement communities or health-care institutions.

The personality profile of the Hawthorne workforce was completed after surveys with 248 workers — something more than 10 percent of the community's workforce — in November and December.

Leading the effort were Leo and Linda Petrini, who run a company known as Web Footed Friends Inc. from their rural Minden home.

For nearly a quarter of a century, the Petrinis have been working with companies large and small to identify the personality characteristics — not the skills, but the personalities — of top performers. They've also paid some attention to the characteristics of people who fail in jobs.

The theory, Leo Petrini says, is this: Employers can train skills. But they seldom have much success changing a worker who isn't willing to do a job or doesn't like it.

"You can't train yourself out of a bad hire," he says. It's better to know what personality types fit a job, find people who fit that profile and provide the training they need.

The Hawthorne project, however, turns the conventional approach of Web Footed Friends on its ear.

Rather than identifying the traits of successful workers so that companies can recruit employees who will thrive, the company set out to identify the personality traits of the Hawthorne workforce. Armed with



Bomb fins from the Hawthorne Army Depot now stand as art objects in "The Fin Field." Threatened closure of the base brought development of a new economic development tool.

that information, economic development officials can woo employers who want workers with those traits.

Offering cash prizes in a raffle to participants, teams from Web Footed Friends set out to convince residents of Mineral County to complete the survey.

The work has some urgency. Mineral County barely averted closure of the Hawthorne Army Depot and the loss of 200 jobs last year.

In fact, money provided by the federal government to cushion the blow of that loss was used to finance the Web Footed Friends study. And the work had the strong encouragement of Tim Rubald, the newly appointed director of the state's commission on economic development.

Among the personality characteristics of the Hawthorne workforce: It's committed. Conventional in its thinking. Introverted, maybe even reserved. Very sensitive. Impulsive and carefree. Candid. Competitive. Independent.

That, Petrini says, begins to suggest employers that might fit with the workforce.

The combination of competitiveness with introversion suggests inbound call centers — but not sales-oriented outbound centers.

Economic development professionals now can begin matching the personality of the workforce to potential employers, providing Hawthorne with a competitive advantage in the effort to attract new jobs to the town.

"Every community in America is pursuing every company in America," says Petrini. "In these tight labor markets, we're able to tell the employers that we have a workforce

that meets their requirements."

New T-shirts reading "A Match Made in Hawthorne" spread the message about the community's approach.

Just as important is the information the survey provides about employers that are less likely to succeed in the community, says Tom Fitzgerald, chief executive officer of Nevadaworks, the job development agency in northern Nevada.

"We now know we wouldn't want to waste valuable time on high tech when we don't have a workforce there," he says.

At the bare minimum, Fitzgerald says the survey provides basic information about the workforce — its demographics, its experience, the goals of its participants — that will shape job-training efforts.

A more subtle use of the profile, Petrini says, is guiding the leadership of the community as it prepares an economic development strategy.

The findings that Hawthorne's workers are independent minded, for instance, suggests that team-oriented programs might not work.

"It's a more difficult challenge than the standard books on leadership will tell you," Petrini says.

While Web Footed Friends continues its focus on private-sector users of its service, the company also is looking for other communities where it might prepare a personality profile of a workforce.

Fitzgerald, meanwhile, says Nevadaworks believes the workforce profiles might be valuable for communities elsewhere in rural Nevada.