W.W. Grainger Aids County In Adding Jobs

Jonathan Partridge, Patterson Irrigator

While other parts of the state have experienced a gradual economic recovery, Stanislaus County has had no such luck, with the unemployment rate hovering around 16 percent last month.

Now, a local economic development agency hopes to kick-start the recovery by encouraging local businesses to add at least one new position.

StanTogether, a campaign that Stanislaus County Alliance Worknet started Feb. 1, encourages employers to create 1,000 jobs by July 31, with hopes that new employees will spend more on goods and services and push the economy in a positive direction.

“I’m pretty excited and cautiously optimistic about being able to reach our goal within the next six months,” said Jeff Rowe, director of the Stanislaus County Alliance Worknet.

Eight companies have already signed up to participate in the campaign, including **W.W. Grainger Inc.**, which plans to add several positions at its Patterson distribution center.

The idea originated when Rowe and Bill Bassitt, CEO of the Stanislaus Economic Development and Workforce Alliance, lamented that despite efforts to create jobs in Stanislaus County, there seemed to be little success, Rowe said.

Worknet, which provides resources to help prospective employees find jobs, is a division of the Alliance, an economic development agency that works on behalf of Stanislaus County and its cities.

Many businesses within the county have been skittish about hiring in light of the challenging economic climate, Rowe said. At the same time, he said, local employers were receptive when he asked whether they would be willing to create one new position within six months.

“Even before the campaign started, the response was pretty overwhelmingly positive,” he said. “It gave us encouragement to give this a try.”

Worknet plans to host major events throughout the county to promote participating businesses in conjunction with the campaign, Rowe said. In addition, Modesto country music radio station KAT Country 103 will spotlight participants, he said.

Participating companies may also be eligible for government funds that could reimburse as much as 65 percent of a worker’s wages in the first three months of employment. That compensation is dependent upon the company providing on-the-

job training during that period, Rowe said.

Grainger might hire six new workers, or possibly more, within 45 days, depending on customer demand, said Hector Vega, director of Grainger's Patterson distribution center. The company opened its Patterson warehouse in the summer and has brought on about 200 employees so far.

"To our delight, we've had an absolute home run here with employees," Vega said, noting the quality of the local workforce.

New Grainger positions offered through StanTogether mostly would entail warehouse work, from checking products to loading trucks. Wages at the company start at $13 per hour, and workers receive benefits and participate in a profit-sharing trust, Vega said.

City Manager Rod Butler said this week that he had not spoken with Alliance representatives about the program, but he thought it sounded like a good idea. He said he might even inquire about how the city could get involved, too.

Other businesses that have signed up to participate in the campaign include:

• Data Path, an information technology company in Modesto

• Modesto Junk Company, a scrap metal recycler

• Prudential California Realty's Modesto office

• Alpha Poultry and Livestock Equipment in Turlock

• Ross F. Carol, an engineering contractor in Oakdale

• Fire2Wire, a Salida-based wireless Internet company

• Sconza Candies in Oakdale

Participating companies can add a job position through the program on the campaign's website. All positions must be at least 30 hours per week. Job openings either must not have existed previously or must have been vacant within the past 12 months. *Visit* www.stantogether.com *[1] for more information.*

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