

# PREFERRED WORKER Adviser

Fall 2005

## Worksite modification

By Jeff Griffin

### **Worker disability**

After Rick developed bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome, he was unable to return to work as an electronic assembler. He was released for medium work with restrictions of lifting and carrying 50 pounds occasionally, 25 pounds frequently, and avoiding repetitive sustained, vibration tasks and repetitive gripping and squeezing. In summary, Rick is significantly limited in his ability to repetitively use both hands.

### **Work setting**

Rick returned to work with a new employer as a production manager for a janitorial service. He supervises a staff of 20 people who provide janitorial services. He is responsible for scheduling work, supervising crew leader meetings, editing the employee handbook, collecting timesheets, and recording all daily work activities. He also does some scrubbing of floors, cleaning bathrooms, picking up trash, vacuuming, and cleaning windows.

### **Job obstacles**

When Rick records the daily work activities, it requires an extensive amount of writing, requiring a great deal of gripping and squeezing for extended periods. He also uses a floor scrubber that requires standing and moving the machine from side to side. The floor scrubber requires a lot of upper-extremity force to operate, and it vibrates a great deal. He also applies floor wax using a mop. This mopping action requires a lot of grip strength and repetitive use of the hands and arms to do the mopping. These job duties exceeded Rick's injury-caused permanent restrictions.

### **Modifications**

A laptop computer was provided to minimize the amount of writing Rick has to perform. A riding floor scrubber was provided to eliminate the prolonged gripping and vibration of his arms and hands. An automatic wax applicator that could be pulled or pushed was provided to eliminate the mopping action. The worker could either pull the wax applicator manually, if he wished, or he could pull the wax applicator behind the scrubber. Since the floor scrubber and wax applicator had to be moved to various locations, a trailer and tow hitch for a pickup truck were provided.

### **Cost**

The cost of the worksite modification was \$20,601. ■

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## Register for our e-mail service

If you are looking for employment, we have a system that allows you to register by location to receive job postings. When an employer posts a job on the Preferred Worker Program Job Match site in the geographical location for which you are registered, an e-mail will be sent to you with a link to the job posting. For more information, call (800) 445-3948 or (503) 947-7588.



## New direct link

To get to the online Preferred Worker Program or the Job Match site more quickly, use our new direct link, [www.oregonpwp.info](http://www.oregonpwp.info).

# Meet Jane Fernandez

By Jenni Bertels

Jane Fernandez is a re-employment specialist with the Reemployment Assistance Unit (RAU) in Salem. She provides technical guidance and consultation for the Preferred Worker Program and Employer-at-Injury Program to Oregon's injured workers and their employers. She spends her day answering questions on the phone and determining worker and employer eligibility for the Preferred Worker Program, premium exemption, wage subsidy, and obtained employment purchases.

After graduating from the University of Minnesota, Jane spent some time

working in vocational evaluation for Goodwill Industries in Madison, Wisconsin.

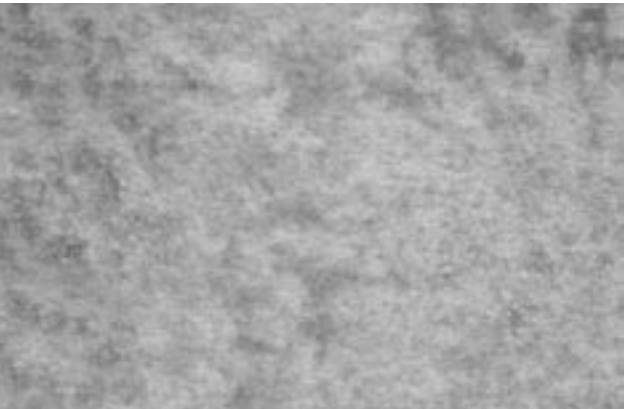
She started working for Workers' Compensation Division in June 2003 as an appellate service representative in the Appellate Review Unit and was promoted to RAU in May 2005, where she currently works half-time. Prior to that, Jane worked for SAIF Corporation for almost 20 years in a variety of positions: claims adjuster, claims supervisor, management analyst, training and development consultant, help desk supervisor, project analyst, and Internet/Intranet coordinator.

Jane derives much satisfaction from her work in the Preferred Worker

Program, because she can see immediate results from the work she does. She likes being able to explain program benefits to injured workers as well as potential employers. She often hears the comment that this program has been a significant factor in helping someone get back to work after an on the job injury.

Jane and her husband have lived in Salem for more than 30 years. They have three grown children, who now live in Salem and Portland. Jane's hobbies include traveling with her family, running, reading, and spending time with her friends. ■

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John Shilts

**Re-employment assistance**

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Medford office ..... (800) 696-7161

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# Questions & answers

By David Onheiber

**Q** I've had several on-the-job injuries over the years, but my eligibility for the Preferred Worker Program has never been determined. After my most recent injury, I was released for regular work. Does this mean that I'm not eligible for the Preferred Worker Program?

**A** Based on your most recent claim, you are not eligible for the Preferred Worker Program because you were released for regular work. However, Preferred Worker Program staff will also look at your other disabling claims. Since your eligibility has not been reviewed before, if you were not able to return to your regular work because of permanent, injury-caused restrictions from one of your other closed claims, you will be eligible for the program and you will receive a Preferred Worker card.

**Q** How much time do I have to send you a request for premium exemption and wage subsidy?

**A** If you send your completed requests for premium exemption and wage subsidy within 30 days from the day that you start work, then, upon approval, the start date for premium exemption and wage subsidy will be the day you started the job. If you send the completed requests more than 30 days from the date you started work, then, upon approval, the start date for the requests will be the day after you send the completed requests to the Preferred Worker Program.

**Q** Because of restrictions from my injury, I need power tools to do my job. I'm concerned that the tools could be stolen. Will the Preferred Worker Program pay for a cabinet with a lock?

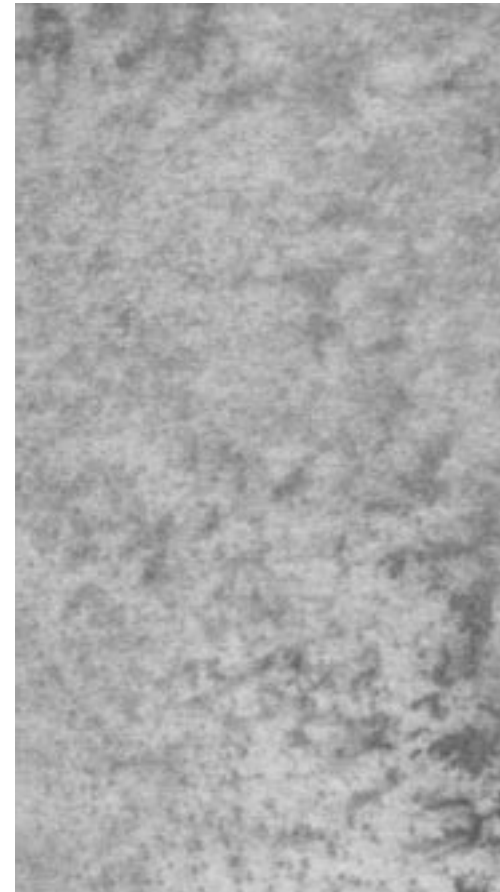
**A** Since July 1, 2005, worksite modification assistance may include lockable storage for worksite modification items that are not secure when the employer or worker does not have available a way to protect the items. A maximum of \$2,500 may be provided to secure worksite modification items.

**Q** I understand that the employer at injury can now request Preferred Worker Program assistance to help return their injured workers to work. My doctor told me that because of my accepted claim I would not be able to go back to my old job. If my employer receives Preferred Worker Program benefits, does that mean that I will not be able to ask for help later if I need assistance?

**A** It is true that since July 1, 2005, the employer at injury can ask for Preferred Worker Program assistance. The worker must agree to accept the job by signing a written job offer. Any assistance that is provided to the employer is not counted against the assistance that is available for the worker to use at a later date.

For example, the Preferred Worker Program may approve the employer's request for worksite modification, premium

exemption, wage subsidy, and obtained-employment purchases for modified regular work or for a new job with the employer at injury. If the worker starts a new job with the employer at injury, or starts a job with a new employer while he or she remains eligible for the Preferred Worker Program, then the worker may request the same benefits for the job with the employer at injury or for the job with the new employer. ■





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## Success story

*By Tim Kessel*

Steve, a 42-year-old journeyman painter, was injured on the job in 2003. After recovering from his injury, Steve entered a vocational training program and was retrained as a cost estimator. Following his training, he found employment in Ontario, Ore. Because he was then living in Portland and it was more than 50 miles to his new employment, Steve was eligible for moving assistance through the Preferred Worker Program. Since the worker was eligible for vocational assis-

tance, moving assistance could not be provided until he started the job. The Preferred Worker Program provided a moving company to move up to 10,000 pounds of Steve's personal items. The program also reimbursed him for one-way vehicle mileage, temporary lodging, and meals for up to 14 days.

Steve also used his premium exemption and wage subsidy benefits with his current employer and is in the process of purchasing a computer required for his job. A Preferred Worker consultant is evaluating his

job for work-site modification so that he is able to work within the limitations brought about by his injuries.

With the assistance of the Preferred Worker Program, Steve has relocated for his new employment, received modification equipment needed to perform the job, and returned to gainful employment at wages near what he was earning at the time of the injury. ■