

PREFERRED WORKER Adviser

Spring 2008

Jerry Rutherford leaves impact and inspiration

By Stephanie Snyder



Jerry Rutherford

After serving more than 19 years with the Workers' Compensation Division, Jerry Rutherford, manager of the Reemployment Assistant Unit, will be taking his first two-week vacation. Rutherford's upcoming vacation is not only unique because he has never taken two consecutive weeks off work before, but also because he won't be coming back to the division after his vacation. Rutherford is retiring at the end of May, and although he hopes to remain connected to the division by doing some private consulting work, he wants to pursue other interests in this new phase of his life.

Rutherford's work at the division started in 1988 when he worked as a vocational counselor in the Rehabilitation Review Section. Numerous changes to Oregon's

workers' compensation laws occurred during Rutherford's first few years with the division. Rutherford was with the division when the current Preferred Worker Program was born in 1990 and when the Employer-at-Injury Program was launched in 1993. Upon implementation of these programs, Rutherford helped to make rule changes less prescriptive and more user friendly. Rutherford recalls that over time the programs evolved into ones that people could use more easily. The programs became more popular with insurers, workers, and employers, consequently making them more satisfying to Rutherford. "It was great to see the improvements and how what we offer really can change someone's life," he said.

One of the benefits of working in the field with injured workers is getting to experience the human element and emotion of helping someone who is facing life-altering changes after being hurt on the job, said Rutherford. He remembers one specific case where he negotiated with a worker and an employer that resulted in helping the worker keep his home. Rutherford was able to visit with the worker and approve benefits - just in time. One more day and the worker would have

lost his house. "The worker's gratitude was overwhelming," said Rutherford. "I was so proud to be a part of a program that provides relief at such a crucial time to people in need."

After accepting the management position in the Reemployment Assistance Unit in 2005, Rutherford no longer worked in the field, so he did not have the opportunity to experience the personal reward of working face-to-face with injured workers. However, he remained steadfast in his pursuit of helping people and making the system more user friendly. He continued to encourage changes in the system that will have a long-lasting positive impact.

Upon retirement, Rutherford's schedule may look different, but it is doubtful that his passion for making a difference will change. He plans to balance his time with projects at home and serving various local organizations, including the Union Gospel Mission, American Red Cross, and working in a private contracting capacity with the division. It seems that Rutherford will go on leaving a message of inspiration to all the lives he touches, and he will be missed. ■

Frequently Asked Questions

By Tony Guidone and Kerry King

Q If the property provided for a worksite modification is damaged, in need of repair, or lost, will the Preferred Worker Program repair or replace the property?

A No. The Preferred Worker Program will not repair or replace the property, per OAR 436-110-0350(2)(o).

Q What does “Miscellaneous” category mean and how do I use it?

A The Preferred Worker Program underwent some rule changes, effective Dec. 1, 2007. In the past, several stakeholders and preferred workers suggested ways to improve the program, so we created the “Miscellaneous” category. This category is intended to help preferred workers overcome barriers to finding, accepting, or retaining employment. The maximum category amount is \$2,500. We can assist with multiple requests; however, once you reach the maximum and the category is exhausted, it cannot be renewed. Some examples of the type of assistance we’ve provided include: car repairs to continue employment, gas for an interview, a bus pass for job search, clothes for an interview, and certifications required for an interview. This category allows for a certain level of creativity, but

reemployment specialists still have discretion to determine if a request is reasonable, practical, and feasible in order to help preferred workers overcome barriers to employment. It is important to remember this category is not just a personal account to draw from; it is assistance to help you get a job or stay employed. We are anxious to hear from you about how we can help you overcome barriers to employment.

Please keep in mind all requests do take time to process. It can take up to seven working days to get a check from the Preferred Worker Program, once the request has been approved.

Q I returned to work more than a year ago, can I still use my Preferred Worker Program benefits?

A Yes. You have up to three years to request wage subsidy, employment purchases, or worksite modification. You and your employer can complete the wage subsidy agreement or the employment purchase request online at www.oregonpwp.info. Print, sign, and fax or mail the form to the Preferred Worker Program: P.O. Box 14880, Salem, OR 97309-0405 or call us at 800-445-3948, and we will mail you the form. In addition, we accept worksite modification requests over the phone.

Q Can I offer these benefits to a business owner that does not have any employees?

A Yes, however, the business will need to purchase a workers’ compensation insurance policy before you start working. The fee for obtaining a policy is approximately \$180 a year. It takes a little time to set up the policy, so please contact us as soon as possible and we’ll send you the necessary information to get the special preferred worker policy. ■

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A worksite modification success story

Charlie injured his low back while employed as a carpenter. Because of this injury, he had surgery and was unable to return to work as a carpenter. Charlie's permanent restrictions include no lifting, pushing, or pulling of more than 50 pounds; no overhead lifting of more than 35 pounds; and only occasional bending, crouching, and kneeling. Charlie's new job is as a public works laborer for the city of Chiloquin. One of his new job duties includes moving barrels of chlorine that weigh up to 450 pounds from the back of the storage room to the front of the room. Before the worksite modification, he pushed these barrels by hand. Once the Preferred Worker Program provided wheeled dollies as a worksite modification, Charlie is now able to move these barrels without exceeding his permanent restrictions.

Chlorine Barrel Storage



Before worksite modification – barrels have to be moved by hand

Water Treatment Tank



Before worksite modification – equipment carried up stairs by hand

Another of Charlie's new job duties consists of assisting a co-worker to carry equipment, including a generator that weighs 250 pounds, up 14 steps to the treatment tank platform. A jib crane was installed, as a worksite modification, which eliminated the need for Charlie to manually carry any heavy equipment up the steps.



After worksite modification – equipment hauled by jib crane

It is more than a year since the worksite modification was completed. Charlie says he is able to perform his job duties without difficulty and without risking additional injury. He is able to work 8-to-10 hour days and still be able to go home without pain. Charlie is amazed the Preferred Worker Program has done so much to help him be successful at work.

Contact the Preferred Worker Program at 800-445-3947, visit our Web site at www.oregonpwp.info, or send an e-mail to pwp.oregon@state.or.us for more information about our program. ■



After worksite modification – barrels on wheeled dollies, moved without exertion

Find Preferred Worker Adviser newsletters online

Did you know you could view past issues of *Preferred Worker Adviser* newsletter online? Well, you can!

This quarterly publication offers information for preferred workers who have not yet used their return-to-work incentives. The newsletter includes a variety of information

regarding job search tips, frequently asked questions, how to use employment purchases, how to get a replacement card, interesting worksite modifications, and much more.

To view past issues of the *Preferred Worker Adviser* newsletter online, visit the Workers' Compensation

Division's Web site at www.wcd.oregon.gov. Click on *Preferred Workers*, then click on *Preferred Worker Adviser* newsletter and select the issue you want to read or visit http://www.cbs.state.or.us/wcd/communications/publications/adviser/dir_pwa.html. ■



Workers' Compensation Division

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The Preferred Worker Program (PWP) has benefits for you

- ◆ Are you using the PWP benefits to offer incentives to an employer to hire you?
- ◆ Are you using the PWP benefits to modify a job to allow you to work within the limitations caused by your on-the-job injury?
- ◆ Are you using PWP benefits to purchase employment items such as tools and clothes?
- ◆ Did you know the PWP benefits are easy to access?

JUST CALL AND ASK:
800-445-3948

El Programa para el Trabajador Preferido (PWP) tiene beneficios para usted!

- ◆ ¿Está usted usando los beneficios que el PWP ofrece para incentivar a que un empleador le dé trabajo?
- ◆ ¿Está usted usando los beneficios del PWP para modificar su trabajo y así poder trabajar dentro de las limitaciones causadas por su lesión en el trabajo?
- ◆ ¿Está usted usando los beneficios del PWP para adquirir lo necesario para el trabajo como herramientas o ropa?
- ◆ ¿Sabía usted que es muy fácil usar los beneficios del programa?

SOLO LLAME Y PREGUNTENOS AL:
800-445-3948, ext. 7584

Программа преимущественных прав (PWP) имеет льготы для вас!

- ◆ Используете ли вы льготы программы преимущественных прав (PWP) для побуждения работодателя принять вас на работу?
- ◆ Используете ли вы льготы программы (PWP) для модификации рабочего места, чтобы облегчить ограничения, имеющиеся после травмы, полученной на производстве?
- ◆ Используете ли вы льготы программы (PWP) для покупки рабочих предметов, таких как инструменты и одежда?
- ◆ Знали ли вы, что льготы программы (PWP) могут быть легко достижимы?

Вы можете узнать больше позвонив по телефону: 800-445-3948, ext. 7639