

PREFERRED WORKER Adviser

Summer 2005

NEW!!! Preferred Worker Program rules change

By Jerry Rutherford

Major changes to the Preferred Worker Program became effective July 1, 2005. Preferred Worker identification cards issued before July 1 that have not yet expired will be replaced with new cards. The effective dates for the identification cards will not change, but there are different time frames in the instructions printed on the new cards.

Under previous rules, if a Preferred Worker identification card and/or Wage Subsidy Agreement were sent more than 90 days after the start-work date, the request was denied. Now, if a Preferred Worker identification card or Wage Subsidy Agreement is submitted to the division by a worker and employer more than 30 days after the start-work date and is approved, Premium Exemption and/or Wage Subsidy begins at 12:01 a.m. the day following the date the request was sent to the division. If the request is sent within 30 days, the effective date is the start-work date.

Another change is that a worker's eligibility for the Preferred Worker Program now begins with a review of the injury-caused restrictions from the most recent disabling claim or disabling claim opening. This part of the process is the same as previous rules. But now, if the worker is not eligible under the most recent disabling claim opening, the division looks back at previous claims see if the worker had ever been eligible for but did not receive a Preferred Worker card. If the division finds a worker was eligible on a previous claim, it issues a card to the worker, which was not allowed under previous rules.

Additionally, when we approve worksite modification items that are susceptible to weather damage or theft, we can approve a request to protect these items in the Worksite Modification Agreement if the employer or worker doesn't already have the means to protect them. The maximum for this purpose is \$2,500. Examples might be a locking toolbox for expensive tools or a small outbuilding to house a special lawnmower. In the past, we could not approve these items because the items themselves did not "overcome an injury-caused restriction."

If you have questions about the Preferred Worker Program, send e-mail to PWP.Oregon@state.or.us or call The Preferred Worker Program, toll-free in Oregon, (800) 445-3948. ■

In this Issue

NEW!!! Preferred Worker Program rules change	1
Register for our e-mail service	1
New direct link	1
Worksite-modification success	2
When do you tell an employer you are a Preferred Worker?	3
Success story.....	3

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.

Worksite-modification success

By Bruce Friedrichsen and Heather Grogan

Right-handed John Ames, sustained severe injuries to his right arm while operating a jackhammer that went out of control and struck him in the head and right forearm. After two surgeries on his arm, he went through a period of rehabilitation. Because he had loss of grip strength and loss of sensation do to nerve damage, John was unable to return to his construction laborer work, and was found eligible for Preferred Worker benefits.

Initially, John returned to work as a maintenance worker activating premium exemption and offering wage subsidy to the employer. Subsequently, he changed jobs and commenced work as an assistive technology research technician with Eugene Research Institute. Although people with doctorate degrees applied for the position and John had little computer experience, the employer hired John because of the Preferred Worker Program premium exemption and wage subsidy benefits. He received a digital camera and software as PWP obtained-employment purchases.

John's permanent impairment precluded repetitive right-handed tasks such as handwriting and prolonged keyboarding. Because these tasks were essential to his new job, he requested worksite modification assistance. A program consultant evaluated and approved voice recognition software and computer hardware to operate it. The worksite modification included Dragon Naturally Speaking software and training; two laptop computers, one PC and one Mac; a mobile voice recorder; a portable printer; a monitor; and a docking station.

John found the voice recognition training insufficient for his work duties and began self-training research that included consulting with the author of Dragon Naturally Speaking software and other hardware and software experts to find the best application for his work setting. John became an expert voice-recognition software and application consultant.

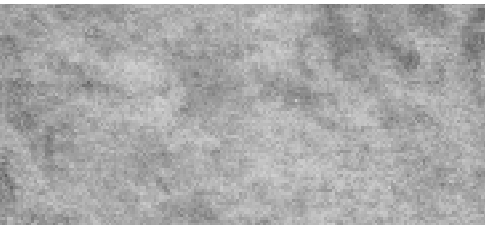
The Preferred Worker Program relies on John's expertise for PWP cases that call for voice-recognition computer operation. John is able to build job-specific vocabularies into voice-recognition software for medical, legal, social service, and educational jobs.

John serves as the voice-recognition consultant for Oregon public

schools' staff and students with special needs. In one case, John served as a private consultant for a student and family who had filed a grievance against the school for lack of accommodation for their child. The school administrator said that John not only provided excellent advice, training, and coaching for the student's use of the voice-recognition software, but also mediated what had been a difficult situation between the school and family.

After three years of employment and research with voice recognition, John is now self-employed. He started Assistive and Rehabilitation Technology Solutions, Inc. (ARTS). ARTS designs computer systems for assistive technology and provides specialized software, training, and ongoing support.

John said none of his success would have been possible without the Preferred Worker Program. The program provided the means for John to commence the new work experience, and he provided the determination, focus, and skills application to assist people with special needs. He rises above the challenges in his life and helps others achieve successful outcomes. He is a model for the dedicated, hardworking, injured workers of the state of Oregon. Congratulations, John. Keep up the good work! ■



Administrator, Workers' Compensation Division

John Shilts

Re-employment assistance

Salem office (800) 445-3948
Medford office (800) 696-7161
Web site www.oregonpwp.info

Contributors

Bruce Friedrichsen bruce.c.friedrichsen@state.or.us
Dan Gammon dan.r.gammon@state.or.us
Heather Grogan heather.f.grogan@state.or.us
Bob Williams robert.t.williams@state.or.us

Editor, WCD Communications and Training Section

Ana Contreras ana.contreras@state.or.us

Editing, Dian Cox, DCBS Communications

Design, Shonnie Emerson, DCBS Communications

Preferred Worker Adviser is a publication of the Oregon Workers' Compensation Division.

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, this publication is available in alternative formats. This publication is in the public domain and may be copied and distributed without permission

The Adviser is printed on recycled paper and is recyclable.



When do you tell an employer you are a Preferred Worker?

By Dan Gammon

We frequently receive calls from workers who have been looking for work or about to look for work; they are confused about when to tell an employer of benefits available through the Preferred Worker Program (PWP). Many workers fear that revealing their PWP status will cause employers to shy away from hiring them because they have had on-the-job injuries. Other workers are unsure when to effectively introduce the subject. So we asked a group of recently hired Preferred Workers about their experiences in seeking and finding jobs after injury. We interviewed 26 workers between May 1 and July 1 and asked

them a series of questions about how they handled the subject of their Preferred Worker status. This is what they told us:

Eight of the 26 workers said they were hired after their first interview. The other 18 workers averaged 2.4 interviews before they were offered a job with their current employer (One-third [six] of the workers who had multiple interviews had more than three interviews before they were offered a job). Of the eight workers hired after their first interview, five said they mentioned their Preferred Worker status during the interview, and three mentioned their status after the interview.

Of the 18 workers who had multiple interviews before being hired, seven mentioned their status during the interview with their current employer, nine mentioned their status before the interview, and two mentioned their status after the interview. The same 18 workers reported that, with the employers who did not hire them, six mentioned their status before the interview, 10 mentioned the Preferred Worker Program during the interview, and only two mentioned it after the interview. Seventeen workers said they had no problem when they introduced their status to the employer. Of those

Continued on Page 4

Success story *By Bob Williams*

A loader dropped a log on top of a worker's small skid-steer tractor. The log fell just in front of the protective roll cage and pushed it in and across his legs, causing permanent knee damage. The 40-year-old lumber-mill worker suffered a severely injured right knee and could no longer walk across the uneven ground of the log yard; stand for more than an hour at a time; kneel, crouch, or climb equipment ladders; or lift more than 25 pounds.

The worker had worked at the same mill for 17 years, but, after the accident, there were no alternative jobs suitable for him there. He told me that following his termination, he spent many frustrating months unsuccessfully looking for a new job that would fit his limitations. He said that his sense of self-worth was badly beaten and he felt less and less hopeful that he would ever land a job as good as the last.

This worker did, however, have tremendous family support. He said his wife kept telling him that he was capable of finding a better job than before and that he had to buckle down and use all of the tools at his

disposal to get there. That is when he seriously reread the information sent by the Preferred Worker Program. Other than the mill, there were no other large employers in his immediate area, so he began aggressively pursuing small construction companies for interviews.

This worker planned for each interview, determining each particular builder's niche and deciding how to present his skills and abilities and the Preferred Worker Program benefits to the employer. This worker especially promoted how the employer could profit from the productivity increase that worksite modifications could produce. Because the worker could not climb ladders, he offered to provide a powered scissors lift and a mobile boom truck that would allow him to singlehandedly do the interior and exterior high work that a crew of workers did with scaffolds, ladders, and planks. He showed his employer that heavy lifting could be modified with table and miter saws on rolling stands. Low, repetitive kneeling or bending work could be done with extended-nozzle caulk guns and extended-handle screw guns that would allow the worker to do

more in less time with less fatigue. Heavy drywall paneling could be lifted and handled by a specialized mobile lift. Low concrete-finishing work could be eliminated by using powered equipment with an extension handle that the worker just walked behind. And many interior finishing tasks could be done with extension-handle tools rather than workers climbing ladders.

He was hired by a construction company in a costal community with a sluggish economy. Using the Preferred Worker Program, he and the company received \$25,000 worth of equipment and tools that enabled him to start as a construction tradesman. He was promoted several months later to crew foreman. For the past two years, the company has been rapidly growing and getting larger project contracts and more high-end work because of their new expanded building capacity and the larger equipment base provided by the worksite modification assistance. The worker succeeded beyond the scope of his former job and is looking to the future with confidence and a "can do" attitude. ■

When do you tell . . . *continued*

who perceived there was a problem with their PWP status, most workers said they thought the employers were “scared of hiring them,” “didn’t understand the program,” that the worker was “less than a whole person,” or perceived the worker’s disability as more severe than the worker perceived it.

When discussing the specific PWP benefits, workers tended to mention Wage Subsidy more often than the other benefits. When other benefits were discussed, workers tended to mention all of the benefits. Only one worker mentioned Worksite Modification, initially.

What do all these numbers mean? While this was not a scientifically accurate survey, its results provide some potentially useful insights. Almost two-thirds of the workers had more than one interview (one worker had six interviews) before being offered or accepting a job.

So, if you are looking for work and haven’t landed that job yet, you should realize many workers have had the same experience, and they do eventually find work.

Letting the employer know you are a Preferred Worker before or during the interview doesn’t seem to have much of an effect on the employer’s decision to offer you a job. Workers’ comments suggest that employers react to a Preferred Worker based on faulty — or no — information about the PWP or a lack of understanding about the worker’s disability.

It will be up to you, the Preferred Worker, to let the employer know as much as possible about the benefits of the program, particularly premium exemption and wage subsidy, as these benefits *directly* affect the employer’s “bottom line.”

Another insight you might gain from these workers’ experiences is that

your opportunities for job offers might be better if you practice how you present the PWP benefits to an employer; focus on what these benefits can do for the employer, and focus less on your disability. And when you *do* mention your disability, emphasize the availability of worksite modification assistance (up to \$25,000) that can allow you to perform all the functions of your job at little or no cost to the employer.

Practicing with a friend or family member playing the part of a prospective employer may help you develop a more effective presentation of your skills, knowledge, enthusiasm, and the benefits you bring to the employer. It helps if you do some research about the employer before you interview with them. Letting the employer know you have taken the time to do so sends a positive message about your motivation. ■