

PREFERRED WORKER Adviser

Winter 2006-2007

Did you know?

By Dan Gammon

- You can call the Reemployment Assistance Unit to find out how much time you have left to use your Preferred Worker benefits.
- You can use your Preferred Worker benefits with your employer-at-injury, a new employer, or both.
- You can use each kind of obtained employment purchase twice, once each with two different employers — for items such as tools, clothes, and tuition that you need to do your job.
- You can use premium exemption (with or without wage subsidy) with a temporary employment agency. This is one way to avoid losing eligibility if the three-year period on your Preferred Worker identification card will soon expire. Therefore, your three-year eligibility would begin with the temporary job, and you'd have more time to find a permanent job and use all of the available benefits.
- Our consultants handle hundreds of worksite modifications every year, and they can help you and your employer figure out what kind of equipment you need to do your job within the permanent restrictions caused by your on-the-job injury.
- You can use wage subsidy twice, once each with two different employers.
- All you have to do to get worksite modification assistance is to call the Preferred Worker Program. You don't have to complete any paperwork to get the process started.
- If a potential employer wants to know more about the Preferred Worker Program, have him or her call us, and we'll explain it.
- Jobs in Oregon that are not under the jurisdiction of Oregon's workers' compensation law may qualify for obtained employment purchases through the Preferred Worker Program. ■

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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.

Meet Mikel Olsen



Mikel Olsen

There is a new employee in the Reemployment Assistance Unit (RAU) at the Reemployment & Dispute Resolution Services Section of the Workers' Compensation Division, and he's working hard to provide great customer service. Mikel Olsen is the newest administrative support specialist helping to provide support to the reemployment consultants and specialists in the Preferred Worker Program (PWP).

An Oregon native, Olsen loves living and working in Salem and has two terrific daughters, Heather and Heidi. After he graduated from Sprague High School, Olsen earned an associate degree in human resources and a bachelor's degree from Eastern Oregon University in health and psychology. He spent a brief time as a "hydrant man" volunteering for the Middle Grove Fire Department in the fall of 1974. In January 1976, he entered the United States Air Force and was a cook/baker until 1980. For most of

that time, Olsen served as a field cook at Whiteman Air Force Base in Central Missouri located 50 miles east of Kansas City. He would fly on a helicopter to different locations and cook for various missile crews. Upon leaving the Air Force, he decided to try something different. That "something different" translated into owning a day care with his wife at the time, Debbie, and a carpet and cleaning upholstery company called New Horizons.

One can say that Olsen isn't a "newbie" to state service, because he's worked for various state agencies starting with the 1999 Oregon Legislative session serving the House of Representatives, then Publishing & Distribution, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Disability Determination Services (DDS). For the past three and a half years, Olsen worked for DDS helping claimants understand and apply for disability benefits. Ready for something different and familiar with vocational rehabilitation work, he applied at RAU.

The minute you meet Olsen, it becomes clear how and why he has had such a diverse work career. He is a "people person" and describes himself as "socially interactive." Olsen believes in helping those around him at work and in his com-

munity. A strong supporter of Habitat for Humanity and the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, Olsen participated in Race for the Cure and other events that encourage connection and healing.

Last summer, Olsen purchased a small cottage-style home near downtown, which he has been renovating with great delight. Besides working on his home, Olsen spends time in his home recording studio. Playing guitar (he currently has seven) is a long-standing habit that Olsen has had since 1968 when he was 13. Although he currently isn't playing in a band, Olsen spent several years performing and recording with many musicians and still loves music as much as ever. Attracted to the creative, therefore, it's not surprising that his girlfriend, Marlene, is an artist. Olsen describes her as "the love of my life" and feels "very blessed." To help her with her home-based business is a great joy for him.

"My worthwhile central core desire is to be a positive and affirming voice for the Preferred Worker Program when interacting with staff and clients," he said.

There is no doubt that he is doing just that. Olsen's new co-workers appreciate his uplifting attitude and affirmative customer service spirit, and you will too. You can contact Olsen at mikel.olsen@state.or.us. ■

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

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Questions & answers

By Dan Gammon

Q Can I use my Preferred Worker Program incentives for a temporary job?

A Yes. The fact that a job is temporary, seasonal, part-time, or full-time permanent does not affect eligibility for the program. We will, however, question the wisdom of spending large amounts of money on worksite modifications for temporary employment. One of the reasons you have two wage subsidies is so that you can use one for temporary (or other employment) and the other when you find a better job.

Q When I offer a wage subsidy to an employer and it's approved, does the employer have to keep me working at least six months?

A The employer agrees to treat you like any other employee, but there is no requirement to keep you employed for a certain amount of time. There are various unforeseeable reasons that employers end employment, e.g., a sudden downturn in business or cases in which workers and employers decide they can't work together.

Q Who decides whether a worksite modification becomes my property or the employer's property?

A The Preferred Worker consultant assigned to your modification makes the final decision. The consultant will discuss property ownership with you and your employer before approving the agreement. Usually, items that are attached to the employer's property or equipment become the employer's. Items such as ergonomic chairs or special hand tools usually become the worker's. There are many questions for the consultant to consider with the worker and the employer in order to make the best ownership decision.

Q What is premium exemption?

A It is one of the most important benefits you can offer an Oregon employer. You should understand how it works. Oregon employers are required to have workers' compen-

sation insurance on their workers. Premium exemption means that the employer doesn't have to pay workers' compensation premiums for you as a Preferred Worker for up to three years. The insurance premium rates are high for some occupations and relatively low for others. So, although the savings on premiums vary according to the type of work, premium exemptions may be worth thousands of dollars.

Q Does premium exemption mean the employer doesn't need to have a workers' compensation insurance policy for a Preferred Worker?

A No. The employer still needs to have a policy, but he or she doesn't pay the **insurance premium on you** during the three-year premium exemption period.

To activate premium exemption, you and the employer must fill out the form on the back of your Preferred Worker identification card, sign it, and date it. Then send or fax it to the Preferred Worker Program. This must be done within 30 days of the day you started your job, in order to make the premium exemption effective the date you actually started work.

If your card was issued after you started your job or if you wait more than 30 days to submit the card, premium exemption will be effective at 12:01 a.m. the day after the card was received by the Preferred Worker Program. Your employer and the employer's workers' compensation carrier will receive a "notice of premium exemption" that gives the effective dates of premium exemption. You will receive a Preferred Worker eligibility card. It has a blue state seal instead of the gold seal that is on the ID card. Your new eligibility card will state the effective dates of your premium exemption eligibility period.

Q Do I have to go to work for a new employer to use premium exemption?

A No. You can offer premium exemption to a new employer, but many Preferred Workers use it for a new job or modified regular work with their employer-at-injury. If you are returning to modified regular work, the Preferred Worker Program will have to determine whether the job is sufficiently modified to allow use of premium exemption.

If you leave the job before your premium exemption eligibility period expires, you can offer the remainder of the three-year period to your next Oregon employer. That employer should keep a copy of your eligibility card so he or she will know when the premium exemption period ends. The employer should also send a copy of the card to the workers' compensation insurance carrier.

Q What if my employer is self-insured and doesn't pay workers' compensation premiums to an insurance company?

A It's still important to fill out your card and activate the eligibility period so that if you have a new injury during the eligibility period, claim cost reimbursement will apply to the claim.

Q What is claim cost reimbursement?

A This incentive becomes available to employers through the approval of premium exemption and can be the most valuable of the Preferred Worker benefits to the employer. It works like this: If you have a **new injury** during your premium exemption period, file a claim as you normally would. The employer's insurance carrier or the self-insured employer will administer the claim. Then the Workers' Compensation Division will reimburse the employer for all costs of the claim.

This is a tremendous benefit to the employer. Your claim won't cost the employer anything now or in the future, even if it is a serious injury costing tens of thousands of dollars. Oregon employers get this protection only for Preferred Workers. ■

Address Service Requested

Preferred Worker success story *by Jeff Griffin*

Pete incurred a neck injury while employed as a lift truck technician in Portland. This injury resulted in permanent restrictions of no lifting or carrying more than 35 pounds, no repetitive or heavy exertion with the upper extremities, and no awkward or stationary neck positions. Pete and his employer wanted him to return to his job at injury. The job required that Pete work alone, drive a service truck to the customer's location, and service lift trucks. This job is considered heavy work and often required lifting and carrying parts and materials weighing up to 75 pounds.

The Preferred Worker consultant met with Pete and his employer and determined that a number of job duties exceeded his permanent restrictions. These job duties included pulling himself up to climb into the back of the service truck; lifting and carrying items (e.g. batteries, jacks, tools, grease gun, parts, etc.) in and out of the service truck; opening and closing the roll-up door on the back of the truck; operating a manual grease gun; lifting

the 70-pound hood on the lift truck; and removing and installing bearings on shafts.

To eliminate the need for Pete to climb and pull himself into the back of the truck and lift and carry equipment and materials, the entire back of the truck had to be redesigned, including the back bumper. This allowed the installation of a jib crane to lift items in and out of the truck.

Pete's employer modified the back bumper of the service truck to include a series of steps and a storage area. The new steps allow Pete to step in and out of the back of the truck without having to use his arms to pull himself into the truck. Pete can keep several of the heaviest items in the storage area and lift the items using the jib crane.

A roll-up back door on the truck required about 70 pounds of force to open and close. To solve this problem, Pete's employer installed an electric garage door opener operated with the truck's 110-volt capacity. Pete can now open and close the door with the flick of a switch.

Operating the manual grease gun required about 60 pounds of force. To solve this problem, Pete's employer purchased a pneumatic grease gun and installed a hose reel in the back of the truck. To accommodate all of the modifications to the truck, the employer installed a new rack system and tool cabinets.

Lifting the 70-pound hood on the lift truck that Pete services was accommodated with a block and tackle installed on the lift truck, which reduced the lift effort to only approximately 30 pounds of force. (The employer liked this idea so much that he bought sets of block and tackle for all of his technicians!)

Pete periodically has to use a hammer to seat a new bearing on a shaft. This activity required repetitive hammering using his upper extremities. A pneumatic arbor press eliminated the repetitive hammering.

Pete returned to work three months ago and has not experienced any problems. He is earning the same wage as he was before his injury. The total cost of the worksite modification was \$20,334. ■