

Businesses keep jobs, find growth through San Bernardino County program

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A San Bernardino County Workforce Investment Board program that matches business consultants with companies facing difficulty has helped keep 700 workers at 47 local companies employed, according to the agency.

The federally funded program, using what are called “rapid response” funds from the Department of Labor, provide money for consultants to help challenged businesses increase revenue, reduce operating costs, and recognizing opportunities to stabilize businesses.

Sandy Harmsen, executive director of the Workforce Investment Board, said businesses at risk of losing employees or closing their doors have utilized the program.

“It’s encouraging to see that not only are we saving jobs in the county through our Rapid Response programs, but we are creating jobs and providing resources to employers at no cost,” Harmsen said.

The program in the past two years has saved 686 jobs, created 114 new positions and assisted the companies with \$13.5 million in operational cost savings and revenue, according to the WIB.

“Without strategic assistance from experienced business consultants, many jobs would have been lost in San Bernardino County,” said Miguel McQueen, deputy director of business services and operations with the county Workforce Investment Board. “We were able to help companies remain in business by providing tools and strategies that allowed them to improve productivity, reduce costs and operate more efficiently.”

McQueen says the program, which has been operating in the past four years, has been utilized to assist businesses in several local industry sectors such as automotive, construction, logistics, healthcare and education.

“Companies are still feeling the effects of the recession and the Workforce Investment Board is proud to help get them back to a place of stability,” McQueen said. “Pairing them with consultants that have market awareness in their respective industries has been critical in putting together improvement plans that establish sustainable outcomes.”

Among local companies that benefited from the program is Comfort Mechanical Enterprises, or CME, Inc., of Rancho Cucamonga, which provides maintenance for large scale air conditioning systems, as well as installation.

Pat Hilt, owner of the company, had long serviced local indoor shopping malls. But economic forces have led malls to cut back on demand for CME’s services.

Hilt's company then moved toward diversifying its product offering by manufacturing new ultraviolet light disinfection machines for air conditioning systems and stand-alone units for hospitals.

"Their revenue was sharply declining because of the crash of the real estate industry, so what we did was help them develop a strategic plan to diversify their revenue stream in order to prevent layoffs," said Deisell Martinez, business consultant for the rapid response program.

The UV disinfection products are now finally being rolled out of the company's Rancho Cucamonga factory and the CME is hoping to sell their new products nationally.

"We wanted to get direction to look at (market) saturation, logistics (for the product) and they put a lot of things together, such as what to expect when going after new kinds of business," Hilt said.

Board of Supervisors Chair, Janice Rutherford said the county encourages any company facing difficulty to seek the WIB's professional services.

"No matter how bad it may seem, with quick and effective action from expert advisers, many companies can turn a corner and have a brighter, more profitable future," Rutherford said.

The county's Workforce Investment Board is comprised of business representatives and public partners appointed by the Board of Supervisors who work to strengthen the skills of the region's workforce.

Information: 800-451-JOBS or visit csb-win.org.

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