

## More companies seek deaf employees - In today's hot job market, more companies are turning to talented deaf workers.



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Dell Tool of Rochester, N.Y., typifies the American company of the 2000s--a small business scrambling to meet intense competition with too few hands.

Paul and Gary Jordan, cousins who run the 18-year-old family business, had tried everything to attract workers - even posting signs by the side of the road - but had no takers.

One of more than 300 matching companies in the Rochester area, Dell makes steel and plastic parts for business machines and woodworking equipment.

"Our biggest problem was getting people with machine skills who could read blueprints and inspect their work," Gary said.

But then Gary stumbles upon a solution right in his own backyard. He heard that the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), a college of the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), offered a computer-based machining program. Its graduates represented an untapped source of workers and a partial solution for resolving the chronic labor shortage that plagues the industry.

The Jordans say they've benefited from this valuable source of skilled workers. "I feel it gives us an edge over the person down the street that's in the same situation," Gary said.

Soon after hiring their first NTID graduate, the Jordans hired someone to teach sign language to supervisors and other workers. About eight hearing employees now know some sign language.

NTID is the world's first and largest technological college for deaf students. It represents the first concerted effort to educate large numbers of deaf students within a university of hearing students.

"Deaf people are definitely an untapped source," said Mark Seeger, Sprint customer-department relations manager, whose 150-member department includes 20 managers who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Seeger says NTID grads Angie Officer and Andrew Brenneman, along with the numerous other NTID/RIT graduates on his team, are "some of the top employees we have; they may not hear, but they listen extremely well."

Seeger said Sprint has found that deaf people bring to the job a different kind of training and preparedness. "They are extremely conscientious, and tend to have a survivors instinct because throughout their lives, nothing has been handed to them. They approach their jobs with the positive attitude of "I'm going to work this out."

For more information, call (716) 475-6219

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