



Florida's Local

BUSINESS LEADERSHIP NETWORKS
Promoting the Employment of People with Disabilities

NEWS RELEASE

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BLN EMPLOYERS DIVERSIFY THEIR WORKFORCES TO INCLUDE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Florida, March 31, 2008 – Florida's local Business Leadership Network members are opening their doors to employees with disabilities, according to the *2007-08 Pre and Post BLN Member Survey*. Between 2006 and 2007, the percent of respondents saying that as a result of their "BLN involvement" they hired, mentored or provided internships to workers with disabilities rose from 46 to 62 percent, a 16 percent increase. Of the 631 employer members in the 10 local BLNs working with Wilson Resources, Inc. (WRI), 138 responded to the BLN survey, a response rate of 22 percent.

"These results show that BLNs work," said Leslie Wilson, president/CEO of WRI, the company that developed and staffs the 10 local BLNs. "The BLNs use a 'business to business' approach to educate employers and promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce. They do this through training aimed at changing employers' attitudes and featuring the many benefits of hiring workers with disabilities, sharing best practices, offering paid internships and participating in Disability Mentoring Day. Businesses join the local BLN chapters to learn more about diversifying their workforces to include employees with disabilities."

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The survey also found that attitudes at all corporate levels were the leading barrier to the employment of people with disabilities, specifically employees' and mid-level managers' attitudes/fears. This is consistent with last year's findings. Training was most frequently cited as the solution to overcome hurdles to the employment of people with disabilities. The second leading barrier was, "Aligning individuals with a disability with the right job fit." This is good news because it shows that employers are beginning to think more about bringing people with disabilities into their workplaces as well-matched employees.

"The attitudinal barrier is a major roadblock to the gainful employment of 1.1 million working age Floridians with disabilities who have a 62 percent unemployment rate," noted Jane Johnson, director of the Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities, one of the organizations that funds the BLNs. "Research has found that these workers have higher than average retention rates and are just as productive as their peers who do not have disabilities. Fortunately, the BLNs' efforts to raise employers' awareness of this untapped workforce are having an impact."

As a result of becoming a BLN member, 85 percent of the respondents rated their knowledge about hiring people with disabilities "good to excellent." The percentage of respondents knowing more about hiring people with disabilities nearly doubled, from 49 percent pre-BLN involvement to 85 percent post-BLN involvement. These data are identical to last year's findings.

"Demand among employers remains strong for skilled workers and hiring needs are only expected to increase as Florida becomes the third largest state in the nation by 2011," said Chris Hart, president of Workforce Florida, Inc., one of the BLNs' funding organizations. "Businesses participating in the BLNs are learning what every Florida employer needs to know—people with disabilities not only want to work, but they bring with them loyalty and a strong commitment to their jobs."

For more information on the 2007-08 Pre and Post BLN Member Survey and the 10 local Florida Business Leadership Networks referenced in this new release, please contact: debbiec@wilres.com. Information on the BLNs is available at: www.MyAbilities.org; the Florida BLN website: www.abletrust.org/fbln/; or the United States BLN website: www.USBLN.org.