



Permanent Pride by Ron Janecke
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Business Activity: Sue Huber, owner of Pride Personnel, could promote her company as a 100 percent female-owned and operated corporation. Although this may bring her some business, the head of the Brentwood-based temporary and direct-hire firm would rather tout the fact that the company is locally owned – not tied to any national company – and has a five-person staff with more that 50 years in the industry.

These factors are weighing heavier in an industry that has been hit by mergers and acquisitions, with national firms swallowing up smaller local companies, and in a field where there is high employee turnover.

Pride Personnel provides temp or direct hires (the term used in the industry today instead of permanent hires) for clerical, office, accounting, customer service, mailroom and telemarketing. This includes jobs at all levels, from file clerks to executive assistants.

The agency places people in a wide range of age groups, from new high school or college graduates to those who have retired from other companies. All applicants must take math and spelling evaluation tests. There are also tests on computer software in the company's office. Self-taught tutorial programs are available for people hoping to advance their computer skills.

Unlike most industries, both high or low unemployment can work in a temporary agency's favor. For instance, when the economy is good and unemployment low, many companies find it difficult to get enough help. They turn to firms such as Pride to provide workers.

If there is a downturn in the economy and unemployment is high, temp agencies are inundated with resumes. "When we place an advertisement in the paper during those times, we can get as many as 75 to 100 resumes for one opening," Huber said.

She incorporated Pride Personnel in August 1995 and opened its doors that November. The offices are centrally located on South Hanley Road, about a mile from where Huber was born.

Pride went through an extensive certification program with the state of Missouri. "Unlike some states where a woman can be named president just so the company gets the benefits of being a woman-owned firm, in Missouri there is a detailed process with lots of paperwork to prove you are a working female owner," Huber said. "The state even visited our offices to make sure a woman was running the company."

The designation has led to being certified by the Bi-State Development Agency, Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District, St Louis Development Corp and the Illinois Department of Human Rights. Most customers and those who come to Pride seeking work are from within a 50-mile radius. Job seekers are about 65-percent female and 35 percent male.

All placements are guaranteed for 30 calendar days and a replacement guarantee is good for 31 to 90 days. After 520 hours (13 weeks of 40 hours), a temporary worker can be hired full time for no additional fee.

Executives: Sue Huber is a native St. Louisian, who has spent all her life here except for two years in Hawaii. She was born at what is now the site of a Galleria parking lot and lived on what was then North and South road. She has been in the temporary employment business since 1978 after working for seven years in real estate.

Other full-time staff members are Teri Moody, senior personnel coordinator, who has 13 years experience in the industry; and personnel coordinators Judy Doak with five years experience; Conni Nutis, in the temporary help industry for 10 years; and Vicki Mason, who was a customer service representative for 12 years before entering the temporary industry.

Company history: Huber was in the real estate business in 1979 when interest rates soared to 18 percent. She decided a change in careers was needed and began working for a temporary agency.

Between 1979 and 1995, she worked for five temporary agencies, all national firms, before opening Pride. The name of the firm comes from the first letters of the words, Professional, Reliable, Intelligent, Dependable, Employment.

Her first hire was Moody, whom Huber recruited five different times as she moved from agency to agency. Moody handles all administrative functions and paperwork.

When a company seeks an employee, Pride usually narrows the search to three candidates from whom the employer chooses. Repeat customers often will take the candidate Pride selects. Often the firm gets calls seeking a temp immediately to replace someone who has called in ill.

People in the business have to develop a thick skin, Huber said. Temporaries sometimes say they will take a job, then don't show up or call to say they can't make it. It is also fairly common for a job seeker to sign up with more than one agency.

"It's one of the few businesses today where business is done by a handshake. There are very few contracts," Huber said. "About 94 percent of job seekers are looking for a full-time job."

Revenue: For the fiscal year ended Sept. 30, revenue climbed to \$3.4 million, and Huber is projecting that figure could hit \$4 million in 2001.

Professional services: Charles Long at Long & Associates Tax and Accounting Services is the accountant; Jim Seitz at Lindell Bank & Trust is the banker; Hank Miller at the Henry M. Miller Law Firm is the legal representative; marketing and public relations are done in-house.

The future: Huber would like to open a second office, perhaps late this year.