

ESBLN Eastern Shore Business Leadership Network
By Jackie Gast, Director

Will you hire a person with a disability? For those business owners who are inexperienced with being around someone with a disability, your first internal reaction to that question may be "I'd really rather not..." Why do we react that way? Fear of the unknown, maybe.

This "fear" is probably the number one reason that the *Americans with Disabilities Act* was passed in 1990 which stemmed from the civil rights movement of the 60's. Today, people with disabilities, which cross all ethnic and economic lines, encounter prejudice routinely. Prejudice is particularly strong against people with physical disabilities, such as those with mobility impairments. People assume that it would be difficult for that person to travel or participate so opportunities are not even offered. How many non-disabled individuals do you know that will not drive over the Chesapeake Bay Bridge? It is a fact that many people with disabilities cross that bridge daily! As one can imagine, acquiring gainful employment for people with disabilities can be a challenge. The ESBLN is an organization that focuses on abilities of individuals instead of disabilities.

The ESBLN, founded in 1998 under the leadership of Harvard Custom Manufacturing, Inc. in Salisbury, is a chapter of the Business Leadership Network (BLN), a national, employer-led endeavor of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, supported by the Chamber of Commerce of the United States. The Salisbury Area Chamber of Commerce and the ESBLN was recently honored by Labor Secretary Chao with a New Freedom Initiative Award.

The ESBLN assists organizations in transitioning high school students from school to the workplace. In addition, the ESBLN is developing awareness campaigns including an employer-led event, and modernizing its website. The web site will include postings of job ready individuals' qualifications and contact information at no cost to the employer and an "assistance request" feature for disability related questions. The ESBLN is action oriented and meets the fourth Tuesday of each month at the Salisbury Area Chamber of Commerce. If you would like to serve on the committee, and/or interested in sponsoring the web site, please contact Jackie Gast at esblnjg@aol.com or call 410 749-0144.

Until we get the web site updated, check out this job ready candidate:

Self-starting, reliable & trustworthy individual with good customer service and computer skills (word perfect, lotus, data entry and Microsoft excel certified). Has previous experience as a cashier, greeter, receptionist, drafting file clerk, parts inspector, and answering service operator. Has a high school diploma, general secretarial diploma and four semesters of post-secondary education. If interested, contact Donna Krehnbrink , LSE, 410 749-6183.

In our local experience, of those that are employed, absenteeism is no higher, insurance costs are no different, workman's compensation claims are no higher and retention is greater than those without disabilities. If you are an employer, I challenge you to look to this relatively untapped labor pool and ask yourself, "Is this person able do the job?"