

Central Florida Box Taps Foundation To Bolster Workforce



CFB's Tom Ramsey at left, with Jesse Blocker.

In a tight labor market in Orlando, Florida, Central Florida Box (CFB) has aligned itself with the Foundation For Life to help those recovering from drug and alcohol addiction find gainful employment. For the last six years, hiring temporary workers from the Foundation's recovery center has eased the labor crunch for CFB and, in time, has provided it with valuable permanent workers.

One of the recovering alcoholics, who had been on the streets for 15 years, is now a top rotary die cutter operator at CFB. A job

on which he worked, involving affixing a spot label onto direct print, won the top award in its category last year at AICC's packaging competition in Chicago.

"Currently, we have four permanent workers who have gone through the Foundation's recovery program and four temporaries," said Tom Ramsey, CFB's President. "In addition, a dozen or so recovering addicts have successfully worked at our boxplant and moved on to other jobs more suited to their talents and interests."

The Foundation, which espouses a Christian 12-step recovery program, provides those recovering from drug and alcohol addiction with food, shelter, some financial help and counseling. It also sends them to companies like Central Florida Box, which will hire Foundation clients on a temporary basis if they are physically able to perform tasks required at a box-plant and remain "clean and sober."

"We evaluate their performance and if that is satisfactory after 90 days, they are offered a permanent position," explained Ramsey. "In addition to our rotary die cutter operator, our top flexo operator, a worker in our unitizing area, and another who feeds inks, dies and other materials to our machines when needed—all came to us through the Foundation.

"We are not part of the recovery process," Ramsey cautioned. "Our supervisors are not counselors, though they do interface with Foundation counselors. Our purpose is to be a successful enterprise. If we can't do that, we won't be able to hire more Foundation clients."

CFB, however, does help the Foundation beyond the employment opportunities it offers. It has provided building materials as the Foundation expands its network on "halfway houses" and donates food to an important "outreach" project.

Once a month, the Foundation sets up a "soup kitchen" at an outdoor site near the Orange Blossom Trail and, says Ramsey, who regularly works at these events, feeds from 200-400 people. On these occasions, these needy people, many of whom are addicted to drugs or alcohol, are offered an opportunity to "kick the habit" at a Foundation facility.

For Central Florida Box, working with the Foundation for Life has given the boxmaker a chance "to give back to the community," said Ramsey. By offering work to people who are attempting to turn their lives around, CFB is touching individual

lives in a positive way and helping itself solve thorny labor problems.

Getting Started

To those converters thinking of tapping this labor source, Ramsey advises:

- Contact county or city health agencies to see what recovery agencies exist in your area;
- Contact these agencies to find out how they interact with prospective employees;
- Make a commitment to hire temporaries, even if you have to create a job to forge a relationship with the agency;
- Think about deepening this relationship by donating time, money and/or materials to the agency and its works.