

RETAINING TALENT

By Carol Ward

PDX's Workplace Initiative Aims To Preserve Airport Jobs

Portland International (PDX) is in the midst of a concessions overhaul. Contracts are ending for some operators and new contracts beginning for others. If all goes as planned, all the employees from the previous concessionaires will have jobs with the new operators.

PDX is relying on a new effort, the PDX Workplace Initiative, to help ensure that any current employee who wants to continue his or her career at the airport has ample opportunity to connect with new employers.

The initiative applies to both airport concessions workers and airline service providers, offering a multipronged solution with a jobs platform as the centerpiece. The initiative also offers solutions for improving employee-employer relationships, new worker benefits and other efforts to help ensure employee continuity.

Chris Czarniecki, terminal business and properties director at PDX, says one key goal is "to give people a single source for finding jobs at the airport."

"We have 100-plus employers in the terminal, and it's really hard to know where to go to find a job, so we created the PDX jobs board, which allows our tenants to post positions," he explains. The jobs board averages 80-90 positions per month.

Staffing New Concessions

The initiative was adopted in April 2015, but Czarniecki says it is particularly relevant

now because "75 percent of our concession program is turning over in a three-to-four-year window."

The changing landscape had employees worried about their futures. "When these transitions happen, it's not easy," Czarniecki says. "People have to find new jobs, they have to get in with the new employers. It can be kind of daunting."

Walt Froman, senior manager of concessions marketing and operations at PDX, says the initiative was being put to the test this spring, when two concessionaires began planning for life after their concessions run expires this summer, and new concessionaires are beginning to prepare for their openings.

Noting the two outgoing concessionaires, Froman says, "Between them they have about 65 employees. We worked individually with the employees to get them into the labor pool. The incoming new operators and other existing operators can go into the labor pool and pull out these employees and interview them."

Froman notes that in cases where an employee is finishing up with an exiting concessionaire and starting with a new one, PDX is working with parties involved to ensure shift coverages and ease transitions.

Concessionaire Candace Vincent, general manager of **Made In Oregon**, with three stores at PDX, has made use of the jobs website for her labor needs and gives the effort rave reviews.

"We are definitely benefiting from it because there are so many qualified candidates that go on to the labor board," Vincent says.

"It's a very good way to keep people at the airport employed and also, when leases expire, those people are still going to be in the labor force at the airport," Vincent continues, noting that one of her stores will be closing as part of the concessions transition, and those employees will likely be re-employed elsewhere at the airport with the help of the jobs board. "It works out really well for the companies leaving and staying," she says.

Incentivizing Participation

The commitment from Port of Portland extends further. Each business that hires a full-time employee from the labor pool is awarded \$1,000 from the Port – an amount that must be split 50-50 with the employee – after six months of full-time employment.

Froman says early indications are that the incentive program will be a huge success. "All the people who want to stay from those two businesses are signed up and ready to go, and they will all be hired," he says. "We have three times as many positions opening as we do people who will be losing their jobs."

PDX is further supporting the job transitions with a job fair designed to connect both airport employees and potential workers with employers at the airport. And, in an

effort to attract and keep employees, Port of Portland purchases monthly transit passes in bulk then sells them at a 25 percent discount to employees.

PDX has committed \$300,000 for its fiscal year 2017, beginning July 1, to support the workplace initiative and other programs, Czarniecki says. But not all is coming from Port coffers. "With the new contracts we awarded in the 2016 RFP – there were 11 leases – we put in a \$3,500 workplace initiative fee per lease," Czarniecki explains. "It's not cost recovery, but it helps offset some of the costs of these programs."

PDX also stressed the importance of being a "quality employer" in its RFP, Czarniecki adds.

"We actually scored the proposals on things such as training, advancement opportunities, pay and benefits, in addition to the traditional things you would have in an RFP," he says. "We evaluated these things to some degree in prior RFPs, but in this round we called it out. It was the highest-weighted component."

Czarniecki anticipates the workplace initiative will be around for many years to come, saying, "It makes sense for us to take an active role to ensure that not only we have the best concession program, but we have employees out there in the terminal who are happy and like working here." ■

We'd like to hear your opinion about this article. Please direct all correspondence to Carol Ward at carol@airportrevenue.com.



Above: Portland International's jobs board, featuring concessions and airline service provider jobs, is the centerpiece of a jobs initiative designed to keep workers employed at the airport.



Left and Below: Portland International hosted a job fair in May, building on its jobs website and other efforts to ensure ongoing employment for workers amidst a concessions overhaul.

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