

Digital opportunity underway

Opportunity is knocking. People with disabilities and other barriers to employment served by Opportunity Partners will soon be able to learn new skills and earn competitive wages in a document imaging venture.

Thanks to a \$10,000 grant from the Wells Fargo Community Funding Council, Opportunity Partners will be able to purchase two commercial scanners required to launch the project.

The demand for document imaging services is expanding rapidly. Every day, more businesses are moving to convert bulky boxes of paperwork into organized bits of information easily accessible by computer. Many of these companies outsource the document imaging process to vendors that have the right equipment and experience. Opportunity Partners is preparing to capture a share of this market.

lients and staff recently gained experience in document imaging by partnering with Twin City Fan Companies to prepare documents for scanning.

"In four months, Opportunity Partners workers prepared 3.5 million documents for scanning at Twin City Fan," said Brian Pederson, Opportunity Partners' director of employment services. "The work included removing staples and adhesive notes from documents, keeping documents in order, reducing the size of oversized documents, and ensuring papers were returned to the proper location and in the same order."

The Twin City Fan contract proved that Opportunity Partners clients could handle one part of the complex document imaging process. Staff members were convinced that, with the right scanning equipment and training, their clients could handle the rest of the job. The Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities agrees wholeheartedly. The council is touring the state offering information and training on document imaging to organizations that serve people with disabilities and other challenges.

According to the Governor's Council, 10,000 pages of paper records require a four-foot wide file cabinet for storage, but that same information can easily fit on one computer disk. "It's not only a space and storage issue, but an issue of easily retrieving documents from a computer versus finding stored documents in boxes," Brian said.

In addition to document imaging tasks being a good fit for the people served by Opportunity Partners, research shows jobs in document imaging pay living wages and will provide the means to a brighter future for its clients.

Not only will Opportunity Partners be able to bring scanning jobs on site, but will be an excellent staffing source for companies looking for document imaging at their locations.

Opportunity Partners' document imaging training program - called "E-merging Image" - will provide 20 welfare-to-work clients with 80 hours of training using the commercial scanning system, preparing them to enter community jobs earning \$14-\$15 per hour. Two of these trainees will complete additional training in customer service and supervisory skills.

Archiving documents is more than just feeding paper into a machine. It requires removing documents from boxes in an organized way, preparing the documents by ensuring there are no staples, paperclips or other bindings, checking documents to make sure that all pages are facing the same way, copying irregular sized papers onto full sheets, adding bar codes to documents for electronic storage, monitoring a display to ensure documents are scanned properly, and either placing the documents back into storage, or separating them for destruction.

Businesses interested in learning more about converting paper documents to electronic files should contact Al Gargano at Opportunity Partners, 952-938-5511 or agargano@opportunities.org.

