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Press Release

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Labor Employee Receives National Award

JUNEAU, Alaska—An Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development employment specialist has been recognized for outstanding dedication to customers and colleagues, and extraordinary service to the local community.

“Sheila Baker is a one-stop job center success story,” Labor Commissioner Click Bishop said. “She began as a trainee at the Eagle River Job Center and provided such exceptional service to both job seekers and employers that she was hired permanently. Her efforts are helping her fellow Alaskans find work and a second chance.”

Baker, who still works at the Eagle River Job Center, was honored today by the National Association of State Workforce Agencies with the James F. Walls Award during its annual meeting.

After more than 20 years in the bail bond industry in New Mexico, Baker relocated to Alaska four years ago and began working as a trainee in the Mature Alaskans Seeking Skills Training program. The program helps workers reenter the workforce.

Her unique background has helped contribute to the success of “Bridge to Success” for inmates at Alaska’s all-female Hiland Correctional Center and a training curriculum for MASST trainees.

“From her years in the bail bond industry, Sheila understands there’s a connection between finding work promptly after release and not returning to prison,” Bishop said. “She delivers the seven-week ‘Bridge to Success’ intensive employment training for inmates who are within six months of being released.”

Baker worked with the Alaska Department of Corrections to also provide testing for the ACT WorkKeys/National Career Readiness Certificate to inmates. The NCRC is used as a tool to help inmates show employers their job skills and also that these inmates are proactively trying to turn their lives around while in prison. In just 18 months, 134 inmates have obtained an NCRC prior to being released.

“While the program is still young, a three-year review of recidivism rates for inmates participating in ‘Bridge to Success’ prior to release shows a rate less than half of the general inmate population, with one group of participating inmates from 2009-2010 having no recidivism as of March,” Labor Deputy Commissioner Tom Nelson said. Nelson was head of the department’s Employment Security Division, which runs the Alaska Job Center Network, when the program was implemented.

“We applaud Sheila Baker and the Department of Labor for outstanding work to promote successful prisoner reentry and look forward to continued collaboration,” said Deputy Commissioner of Corrections Carmen Gutierrez. “Employment plays a key component in a former prisoner’s ability to reintegrate back into a community.”

Baker is also the on-site supervisor for MASST trainees placed at the Eagle River Job Center for training and job placement assistance. She helped develop a formal training curriculum for all MASST trainees that includes customer service and job search preparedness, with regularly scheduled evaluations and progress reports.

“Sheila and the Eagle River staff set the standard in Alaska for identifying and enrolling qualified seniors who are then placed at the Eagle River center,” Nelson said. “She has assisted in 18 MASST enrollments whose placement rate for entering unsubsidized employment is above 75 percent. The training curriculum has been duplicated at other job centers throughout the state – resulting in Alaska having the highest placement percentage in the nation for mature trainees.”

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Alaska Job Center Network

Jobs.Alaska.Gov

Mature Alaskans Seeking Skills Training

Labor.Alaska.Gov/masst/home.htm

Sheila Baker photo

Labor.Alaska.Gov/news/2011/11-45/