



Pilot program in Pawtucket finds work for disabled people in city departments

October 15, 2013

By Michael P. McKinney

PAWTUCKET — For about 15 hours each week, a man is entering information from Pawtucket zoning documents into a digital filing system.

He is one of five people with developmental or intellectual disabilities now working in city departments as part of a new partnership between Pawtucket and New York City-based nonprofit organization Fedcap. Soon, a sixth person will join them.

Pawtucket was chosen as the pilot program for what Fedcap hopes to bring to communities around Rhode Island. A Fedcap news release said it would like to have as many as 100 such employees in the state.

The goal “is to provide meaningful experiences to individuals and opportunities for them to be trained, giving them an opportunity to experience an actual workplace environment and all of the things that go with that,” said Tony Pires, Pawtucket’s director of administration.

Those in Pawtucket are not on the city payroll but are paid by Fedcap. The workers also will receive ongoing job coaching from Fedcap. Work will range from maintenance to clerical and office duties.

Fedcap began in 1935, the idea of three World War I veterans who, meeting in Times Square, felt left out of the job market because of disabilities.

Pires said he learned about Fedcap during a conversation about economic development. Fedcap was looking to do a joint venture in which it would provide some employees, particularly veterans and perhaps people with disabilities, for a company that would do manufacturing in Pawtucket. That plan did not work out but Pires got to know a New England official with Fedcap.

Later came word that a federal Department of Labor investigation of an unrelated North Providence nonprofit organization, Training Through Placement, alleged that the agency had for many years violated the Americans with Disabilities Act. People with disabilities reportedly were working for an average wage of \$1.57 per hour.

Training Through Placement’s board of directors was replaced and Fedcap was brought in to properly train people. Pires said he was asked to be a member of the new board overseeing Training Through Placement.

Pires said the partnership proposal with Fedcap was presented to Mayor Donald R. Grebien, who supported it. Grebien asked department heads to figure out where they could use assistance.

Dylan M. Zelazo, city director of constituent services and project manager for the partnership, said that the people Fedcap is paying to work in Pawtucket receive minimum wage, and that the length of a workweek varies by person.

Pires said the city worked out an arrangement where the union representing city employees would have a role in implementing the program.

“It’s going to be a joint cooperative effort among all of us, the city and the union and Fedcap,” August Venice, president of Local 1012, Rhode Island Council 94, AFSCME, said in the Fedcap news release announcing the partnership. “It gives disadvantaged people a training opportunity to enable them to seek future employment elsewhere.”

Christine McMahon, Fedcap president and chief executive officer, said in the release that “a dedicated board of directors, partners like Pawtucket, progressive state leadership, and a laser-sharp focus on the mission will ensure our success.”

In the release, Governor Chafee called the partnership “a great pairing of a strategic partnership to help a vulnerable population develop job skills and work readiness.”

About Fedcap

Fedcap helps people break through barriers to achieve long-term economic security through four Practice Areas: Economic Development, Education, Occupational Health and Workforce Development. Our programs and operations bring education and the power of work to youth in transition, adults with conviction histories, veterans, individuals with disabilities and many others facing barriers to employment. We place people in jobs across a wide variety of sectors and employ more than 2,100 in our own businesses. Fedcap is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and has operations in New York, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, District of Columbia, Florida, Maryland and Wisconsin. For more information call 212-727-4200 or visit www.fedcap.org. Follow Fedcap on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/fedcap>) and Twitter (<http://twitter.com/Fedcap>).