

SEP 10 1993

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When Kathy Niles goes to work at her job at Sequent Computer Systems Inc., Sarah and Tyler, her 4-year-old twins, go with her.

Onsite child-care center becomes recruiting tool

By LINDA BAKER

Special to The Business Journal

Kathy Niles, a market analyst at Sequent Computer Systems Inc., has had her 4-year-old twins in the company's child-care center since they were 3-1/2 months old. "I wouldn't want to work anywhere that didn't have an onsite center," she said. "I don't have to drive all over the place to get my children to school, and I can focus better on my work."

In today's tight labor market, child-care benefits are on the upswing. Child-care officials are also launching new efforts to increase employer awareness of family-friendly policies.

It's a hit-or-miss proposition for many employees, though. In the Portland area, employers that provide substantial child-care services are still the exception rather than the rule. With corporations in the United States losing an estimated \$3 billion a year in problems related to child care,

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family-friendly companies have the advantage in recruitment, retention, training and productivity. Add to that

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Kathy Niles gets great pleasure from being able to spend library time with her children while they're in a child-care center at her workplace, Sequent Computers.

Powell's: Workers love it

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need and then get creative," Culver said. "Even if you only have a three-person work force and your bookkeeper has a child, you can create a child-care subsidy for that person or offer flex time."

Protem offers employees a child-care subsidy of 75 cents per hour toward child-care costs, including a half-hour for lunch and travel time to and from work. "It's a tax-free payment for us, and it's very easy to administer," Culver said.

At Powell's City of Books, child-care vouchers reimburse employees for up to \$400 a month.

"People love it," said Sylvie Horn, Powell's human resources manager. "It's one of the things you hear about when people come to thank you." Powell's invested a little more than \$155,000 in its child-care programs during the last fiscal year, said Horn, but recouped half of that through a state tax credit that assists employers that offer child-care benefits.

Marketing employer-friendly programs like the tax-credit package is the next

step, said child-care officials. Although the tax credits have been available for about 10 years, few employers take advantage of them, said Tom Olsen, administrator of the Oregon Child Care Division. To address this problem, the Oregon Commission for Child Care recently put together an Employer Tool Kit explaining the program.

Three years ago, Children First, in partnership with Multnomah County's Commission on Child and Families, created the Families in Good Company awards. The awards recognize the top family-friendly companies in the state. At the 2000 awards ceremony, Children First will unveil a Families in Good Company seal of approval, available to any company that meets a list of minimum standards.

"It'll be a great recruitment and retention tool," said Rose Yuska, director of public-education programs at Children First. "With the employment rate as low as it is today, workers are looking at child-care benefits when they decide between company A and company B." □