

Pro Tool lands award for family friendly practices

By Vickie Aldous

Ashland Daily Tidings

Professional Tool Manufacturing, LLC in Ashland is one of a handful of businesses around the state to be recognized for family friendly practices and a strong commitment to the community.

The business recently was awarded the 2001 Quality Seal by Families in Good Company, a program of the Portland-based Children First for Oregon. The non-profit group advocates for the well-being of children.

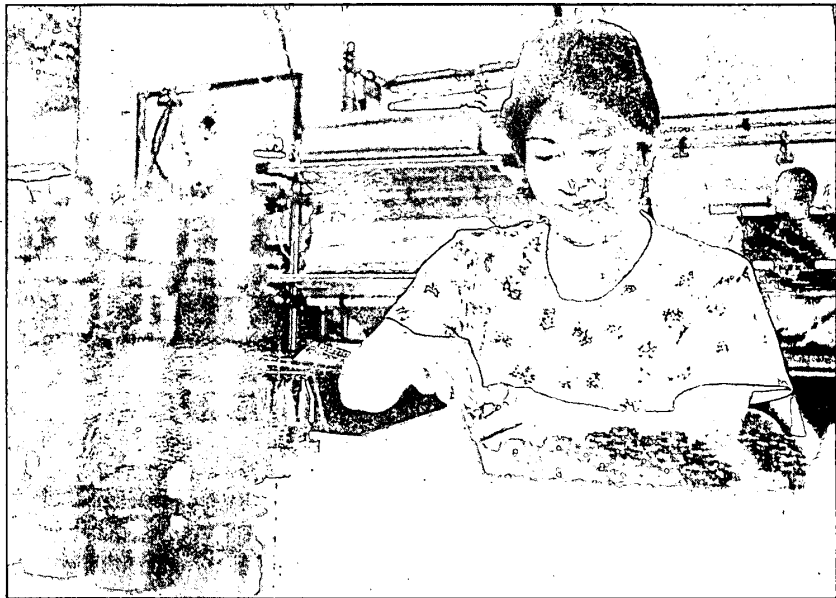
"Pro Tool is one of only 10 Quality Seal Recipients statewide to be recognized by Families in Good Company for their efforts," said Steffani Chapman of Children First.

With about 75 employees, Professional Tool manufactures, markets and distributes drill bit sharpeners through home improvement retailers. In 1999 the company spun off from Darex Corporation, a fixture in Ashland since 1976.

Children First lauded Professional Tool for its health insurance, retirement and profit-sharing plans as well as its flexibility in work arrangements. The non-profit also praised the company for its community involvement through contributions to local charities and sponsorship of youth sports programs.

"We have a flexible work week," said Steve Rissler, information systems director with Professional Tool. "We have a number of people who work four 10-hour days. Others work five eight-hour days. It's not mandatory that we work five days a week for eight hours a day. That can come in handy for people who have kids."

Employees also can arrange to leave in the middle of the work day and return,



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Erika Medrano pieces together a drill on the assembly line at Drill Doctor.

making it possible for a mother or father to pick up children from school and take them to daycare, he said.

In addition to offering fair pay and good health insurance benefits, Rissler said Professional Tool also involves all workers in the company's fate by regularly polling employees, holding daily company-wide meetings, asking them to vote on many business decisions and providing a profit-sharing plan.

"A percentage of the profit is distributed back at the end of the year," he said. "We all succeed or fail together. We all have the same common goal. That makes everybody pay a lot of attention to the cost to operate this business."

The company also supports

the community and encourages its employees to do the same through such programs as the annual Day of Caring. Employees spend a work day on community projects and most recently built a children's playground, he said.

The 2001 Quality Seal is Professional Tool's second state-wide award this year for fostering a work environment that benefits employees. The company placed 16th on Oregon Business magazine's top 50 list for the best small businesses to work for in the state.

The magazine collected input from workers as well as management in compiling top 50 lists for small and large businesses. Workers at Professional Tool Manufacturing scored the company even

higher than managers did on such issues as employee attraction and retention, career development and learning, and rewards, recognition and benefits.

While providing a supportive work environment can benefit employees, it also can improve a business's bottom line and help in the retention of quality workers, according to Peggy Fowler, chief executive officer and president of Portland General Electric, which was recognized by Families in Good Company in another category.

"When employees feel a balance between the workplace and their personal lives, they are often more productive and more likely to stay with the company," Fowler said.