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Laid-off construction worker enjoys new freelance career

BY LIZ WELTER • MARSHFIELD NEWS-HERALD • MARCH 19, 2010

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Bob Lewerenz, 59, of Marshfield, had worked steadily in different construction-related jobs for decades. He never dreamed he would be jobless and eventually create his own company.

But at a time in his life when many see retirement on the horizon, Lewerenz was laid off in 2009 from his job researching and calculating building estimates for multi-million dollar commercial construction jobs.

"If you think the economy is tough, it's a lot tougher in the construction business," Lewerenz said. "I mailed out about 100 resumes and sent another 20 to 30 online." His efforts garnered two interviews which included relocating.

This year, Lewerenz used his extensive career experience to create a new job for himself by forming a company -- Bestimate, LLC. He provides freelance assistance for building contractors.

"I've got a lot of work, it's going well and I'm enjoying myself," he said.

Mid-State Technical College offers programs designed to train displaced workers in new careers to get them back into the workforce quickly, said John Clark, president of the college.

"It's important to work with communities to search out and implement programs in new frontiers," Clark said.

The number of displaced workers, which includes many from the construction fields, has grown at the MSTC campuses in Marshfield, Stevens Point and Wisconsin Rapids.

At the Marshfield campus, 88 students are dislocated workers and the majority are enrolled in health programs.

The ability to adapt to change is key to building a successful work history, said Lewerenz, who added he had been content to work for someone and hadn't thought of starting his own business.

Re-creating his career has been an unexpected pleasure, Lewerenz said.

"If some one had told me this two years ago, I'd have said, 'Oh no, not me.' But the longer I do this, the happier I am. I'm having fun this way," he said.



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Bob Lewerenz works at his Chili office at O'Donnell Engineering. (Dan Young/Marshfield News-Herald)

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