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SIRCH?s Ready for Retail program opens

By Nate Smelle

From Feb. 5 to May 14, **SIRCH** will be hosting its Ready for Retail program. The program will take place two days a week at the Thrift Warehouses in both Bancroft and Haliburton. SIRCH's executive director, Gena Robertson said the idea for the new retail-oriented training program came from the recognition that a significant portion of jobs in the Bancroft area and Haliburton County are in the retail sector. She said Ready for Retail aims to improve customer service and make people in the community more employable.

?Customer service tends to be an issue sometimes and that's the one thing they can really make or break your business,? said Robertson.

?If you have really great people working for you, that's what brings people back. As a community with tourists they go where they feel they've had a great experience. Whether that's eating out at a restaurant where they got fabulous service and good food, or whether it's shopping at a store that has great customer service. It makes all the difference where they are going to go the next time they travel.?

Though SIRCH's retail outlets are typically closed on Mondays, Robertson said that beginning in March they will be open to the public every Monday from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m. to give participants the opportunity to have some on-the-job training at the Thrift Warehouse. She said there will also be exciting giveaways, activities, discounts and freebies on these days. Another benefit of the Ready for Retail program for those who sign up is that it will allow them to network with and learn from local retail employers. By the time the program wraps up, Robertson said trainees will also have earned certifications and training on workplace safety, handling cash and other retail-related topics.

?We are encouraging employers to think about whether they have seasonal staff or casual staff [who] were typically laid off in the winter,? she said.

?The program is free so why not have them take this course? What they get out of it is an employee who is more skilled, more aware, has workplace safety training and great customer service skills. I don't see anyone who loses from this program.?

SIRCH's program co-ordinator in Bancroft Judith Bamford said the Ready for Retail program exposes participants to some of the best practices of retail training with an emphasis placed on customer service excellence. She is looking forward to getting the program started and helping people in Bancroft become better retail workers. Like Robertson, she sees plenty of ways in which the Ready for Retail program will benefit participants as well as the entire local business community.

?Throughout the training, trainees will be gaining hands on practical training as well as have opportunities to network and learn from local employers,? she said.

?These two aspects benefit both the trainee and the community retailers. An added benefit for the trainees is the opportunity to be part of a team that takes over a local retail store and run it for nine weeks on a day it would not typically be open.?

Funding for Ready for Retail has been provided by the City of Kawartha Lakes, and the program is the product of a partnership between SIRCH, the John Howard Society of City of Kawartha Lakes Haliburton and Fleming CREW employment program. With only 15 spots available for trainees in Bancroft, Robertson said anyone who would like to take part in the free 15-week program should sign up as soon as possible. To register as a participant in the Ready for Retail training program, email SIRCH at info@sirch.on.ca; or contact 705-457-1742.