

Unsung heroes thanked for their efforts

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When Biltmore Hats owner Eric Lynes realized three new employees who were immigrants to Canada had language barriers and were unfamiliar with employment practices here, he enticed a workplace supervisor out of retirement to help them assimilate.

That show of generosity was repaid yesterday when the Employment Coordination Committee of Guelph and Wellington County honoured 20 companies helping people with employment barriers ease into the job market.

After Lynes hired the three women from Asia and the Middle East last year, he called on retired seamstress supervisor and trainer Yolanda Piccoli, originally an immigrant from Italy who was with the company more than four decades before retiring not long ago.

"She told us she would help us out if we needed it," he recalled yesterday, pleased to tap her talents for a short while. Because the new recruits were experienced seamstresses, the language barrier proved minor as Piccoli demonstrated local techniques and work practices.

"She was very instrumental in training them and helping them matriculate into the system," he said, describing Piccoli as "very patient and understanding."

"It's really been a blessing."

Biltmore employs about 25 people to make and market a variety of quality hats from traditional to modern.

Almost 100 local employers and key staff attended the 18th annual employer recognition breakfast at the Holiday Inn on Scottsdale Drive, organized by the co-ordination committee. The committee is made up of 18 area

organizations and government agencies that aid people with employment issues like physical, developmental or other work barriers.

"What most of us need is a chance to prove our worth," event master of ceremonies Paul Osborne said.

"The employers are being honoured today because what you do isn't easy," he told them. "It takes work, selflessness, persistence and, above all, patience."

Osborne, Conestoga College's marketing director, compared the determination of people with workplace barriers to hardy grasses that flourish over difficult terrain.

"They are like grass that shoots up through the tarmac in a parking lot or through cracks in the sidewalk," he said. "They refuse to give up despite the odds and find a way to grow and thrive."

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saying thanks

The 20 employers honoured yesterday included:

Galaxy Cinemas

MBM Food Services Ltd.

RR Donnelley

V & S Solutions/ Rose of Sharon

Biltmore Corp.

Budd Stores Co. Ltd.

Winners Apparel Ltd.

Value Village Stores Ltd.

Kam's Grower's Supply

Global Currency Services Inc.

Gobbi Masonry Inc.

RBC Direct Investing

Quality Services Inc.

Control Janitorial Inc.

Canadian Contracting Cleaning Specialists

Sandbox Software Solutions Inc.

Wellington Plaza

Guelph Civic Museum

Holiday Inn Guelph

Canadian Red Cross Society