

Hundreds of jobs in 4-county area OK'd for \$200M stimulus for Back To Work Program

By Jim Turner

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PORT ST. LUCIE — All 141 businesses and nonprofits on the Treasure Coast that applied for federal assistance to cover the initial cost of hiring unemployed parents are starting to be notified as to how they are to receive the money.

Gwenda Thompson, president and CEO of Workforce Solutions of the Treasure Coast, said all 850 requested positions in the four-county region — Martin, St. Lucie, Indian River and Okeechobee counties — have been approved for the first round of the \$200 million federal Back to Work Program that is bringing \$61.2 million to Florida.

“We got the stimulus money,” Thompson said with a bit of relief as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services was slow in releasing the money to the state — beyond funds for a small, pilot program through Citrus and Levy counties.

A number of the positions have already been filled, as the companies were rushed to apply in December with the program expected to be under way Feb. 1.

Among those attracted to apply include G&G Citrus in Fort Pierce, the recently opened Kona Beach Cafe in Jensen Beach and IHOP in Vero Beach.

The program pays for up to 95 percent of the salaries of new hires through September who meet federal low-income guidelines and have at least one dependent child at home.

When the program was unveiled late last year, companies were required to scramble over the holiday season to make December deadlines for submitting projects.

Odaly Victorio, Workforce Solution's communications coordinator, said workshops will be set up starting next week with the individual companies to verify that the positions being created are considered permanent and to finalize the contracts.

A SAMPLING

There were 141 businesses and nonprofits that applied for federal Back to Work grants. Here are some:

Maverick Boats in St. Lucie County, 20 positions, including assembly, laminators,

finishers and repair work

Hammerhead Restaurant in Okeechobee County, 57 positions, from servers, to shift supervisors, busboys, bartenders, cooks and dishwashers.

Indian River Auto Parts in Indian River County, 12 positions, including drivers, stock, outside sales and an inventory control manager.

Martin Memorial Health Systems in Martin County, 24 positions, from medical assistants, access service coordinators, patient care technicians, and security officers.

St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office, 10 positions, including a mechanic, clerks, secretary and computer network engineers.

Areas USA in Okeechobee, which oversees Florida's Turnpike reststops and toll plazas, 50 positions, including cashiers, cooks, line servers and maintenance.

Fort Pierce Utilities Authority, 7 positions, including billing specialist, senior staff assistant, apprentice electric line specialist and water distribution.

Oxford Management in Fort Pierce, 40 positions. Collection agents.

G&G Citrus of Fort Pierce, 100 positions, from labor and packing to truck drivers and sales.



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