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Business Close-Up: Putting people to work

By Mary Ann Doyle, Associate Editor
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Heather Pratz is a client at Headwaters, Inc. in Rhinelander, and takes pride in the thorough job she does when performing detailing on a variety of vehicles. Photo By Mary Ann Doyle

Companies, organizations and even individuals looking for help in packaging, production output, vehicle detailing, or paper shredding, Headwaters, Inc. in Rhinelander can help. This organization specializes in accommodating individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities in Oneida, Vilas and Forest counties. Part of that process is providing employment, and Headwaters' clients are hardworking and enthusiastic about being able to contribute to society while earning a paycheck as well.

"We have never had a complaint about the work we do here," said Mary Hardtke, director of Headwaters. "Our clients produce quality products, and they do it with an enthusiasm that is unmatched."

One of the services offered at Headwaters is car detailing. John Aimone is the auto reconditioning supervisor for this division, and he heads up a crew that takes great care in making any vehicle look its best. Complete interior and exterior cleaning is a specialty, and includes thorough vacuuming and carpet and car seat shampooing. Exterior detailing includes a wash, chrome buffing and waxing. This team is so meticulous, they use a toothbrush on some vehicle parts such as vents and dashboard instruments.

Privately owned vehicles are welcome as well as company fleets, including minivans, pick-up trucks and minibuses.

Appointments are required for this service, and there are a number of packages to choose from.

Paper shredding is also offered at Headwaters. Securely locked bins are delivered to businesses for their paper products, and pick up of these bins is available. Headwater employees prepare the paper for shredding by removing foreign objects, such as staples, and then the paper is cut into tiny pieces by a machine. This shredded product is taken to the Oneida County Solid Waste Facility, where it is recycled.

Terri Malone and Wendy Woodall, production supervisors, head up departments that manufacture a number of products and services Headwaters employees can provide to their customers. For instance, one of the services is the sewing of uniforms for all of Wisconsin's correctional facilities. Clients finish belt loops and pockets in addition to caps, cut stray strings and then box the uniforms for shipment. Pet toys that are sold through Foster & Smith are also a specialty, with employees cutting fleece patterns, sewing the pieces together and then stuffing each toy with foam. Buttons are a popular item to produce at Headwaters as well, which can include everything from political campaign buttons to company logo badges.

In addition, Headwaters is now contracting with Trueflight Manufacturing from Manitowish Waters by sorting and packaging feathers for arrows. Employees attach stickers to packaging and then sort arrow feathers by color and dimension. Shrinking wrapping services are also performed at Headwaters and the machines they use can accommodate many items for quality shipping and packaging.

Headwaters has close to 85 employee clients whose abilities cover a wide range. The goal of many clients is to work toward gaining employment in the community, and the companies that contract with them help these clients gain valuable experience that can translate into independence, pride in a job well done and best of all, a paycheck.

Headwaters personnel will work closely with any company or individual to accommodate many types of products. Their goal is to provide quality services that will give businesses the edge, particularly when comes to the bottom line.

"It's such a win-win situation all the way around," said Mary. "Our clients get valuable work experience, and can earn a paycheck while businesses can contract out to us and get quality services and products without having to set up costly machines or disrupt processes that are in place at their businesses."

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Headwaters, Inc., is located at 1441 E. Timber Dr. in Rhinelander. To set up an appointment, call Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

For more information, visit headwatersinc.org, or call (715) 369-1337.

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