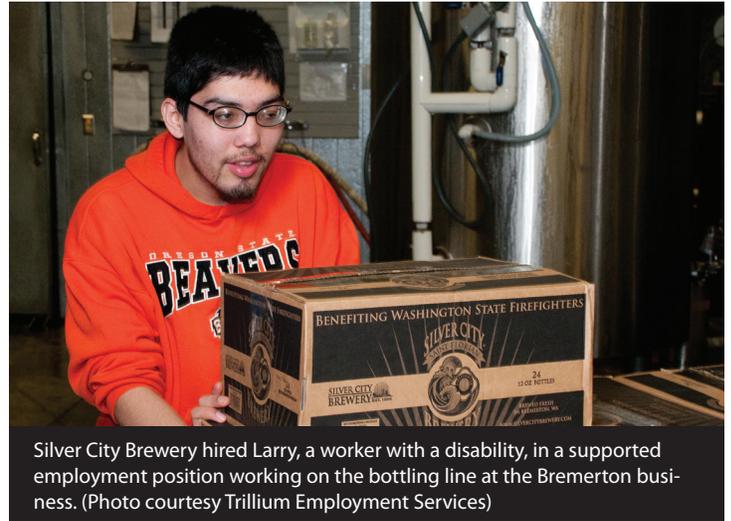


## Disability Employment Awareness Month Thinking outside the job description leads to more

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Disability Employment Awareness Month - The best job matches don't happen by chance. Typically, finding an employee that fits your needs isn't as easy as placing a well-written ad on the Internet. In the era of "do more with less," tight labor hours and cross-training expectations, businesses can't hire for specific staffing needs they have. But what if there was a new way to find an employee?

What if you could write a job description based on your real needs? You could group together important tasks that get pushed to the side when things are busy, or routine duties that distract your experienced employees from handling complex tasks or providing efficient service. If this was possible, would you do it? Silver City Brewery Taproom and Costco have both found success in hiring for niche labor positions; here are their stories.



Silver City Brewery hired Larry, a worker with a disability, in a supported employment position working on the bottling line at the Bremerton business. (Photo courtesy Trillium Employment Services)

Silver City brews and bottles their craft beer onsite and hired Larry to stack pallets with cases of freshly bottled beer. Larry's position created a more efficient bottling line, because previously, other staff had to jump off the line to get boxes or stack the pallet, slowing the process each time.

"Larry has brought a huge amount to Silver City," director of operations Gary Winn said. "He doesn't only bring what his job entails; he also assists with bringing team unity and accountability. He has brought so much with him.

If you have been to Costco's food court in the last few months, chances are you have met Olivia. She works on Costco's busiest days, ensuring that the tables are cleaned, the floors picked up and the condiments stocked, so guests have a positive experience. "Bringing Olivia on has helped my business tremendously," food court manager Tara Elliott said. "When I'm slammed up front and Olivia is on schedule, I know my patio is being taken care of."

"Olivia working in my department takes one more thing off my plate. When she is working I can take care of more pressing matters," added assistant store manager Mark Gill. He explains that the benefits of her specialty job are recognized by not only managers, but customers too.

Silverdale's Costco is a busy store with several million dollars in sales each month. With a store this busy, it's no wonder that the food court was an often overlooked area. Bringing Olivia on as an employee gave Costco the opportunity to free up other employees to make and serve their food without sacrificing a clean lobby or stocked items. Olivia's contagious smile and wonderful people skills meant that Costco customers were able to get the kind of customer service that the company is well known for. So how did these unique job matches come together? Trillium Employment Services specializes in helping Kitsap businesses fill these niche labor positions with talented people who have developmental disabilities. The business and the new employee receive training and ongoing support from Trillium, ensuring a successful job placement.

Curious how it could work for your company? According to Winn at Silver City Taproom, "Working with Larry has helped to break out of our comfort zone. It has helped us to solidify ourselves as a team. When we first brought in Larry it was done as a feel-good segment, and a way to give back to the community.

"Ultimately Larry has become a member of our team. He has brought my employees closer together as a team and has caused my employees to look out for each other more. Larry looks out for us and we look out for him."

Costco's Gill advises businesses to consider hiring a person with a disability. As he notes, "You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. You have to trust in the program and the reputation of the company.

"Trillium will work hard to try and find you the right employee, both for your business and for your team. Thanks to Trillium we now have an extremely effective team member in Olivia. At the end of the day you have a business to run, and your decision to hire has to make business sense. With Trillium's help you can do this."

*Jaymie Heberlein is a senior employment consultant with Trillium Employment Services, which specializes in providing job opportunities, training and retention for adults with disabilities. If your business is interested in learning more about these services, call her at 360-698-6659.*