

Deaf find a home with MAPCO



When Frank D’Ettorre retired from Eastman Kodak Co. in 1992, he set his sights on enjoying the simple things in life. He was going to spend his days fishing and traveling.

But after a decade of living the good life, there wasn’t enough leisure to keep him busy. Determined to still be productive, D’Ettorre started looking for part-time jobs at the age of 63. He knew that would be a difficult task, yet he also knew his biggest barrier would have nothing to do with his age.

Born hard-of-hearing, D’Ettorre attended the Rochester School for the Deaf and has worn a hearing aid all his life. “I can’t live without hearing aids because if I don’t have it, I’m lost,” said D’Ettorre, 70, of Gates.

In February 2005, he applied for a job with MAPCO Parking, a full-service parking company that handles lots at Greater Rochester International Airport and the downtown Civic Center Garage, among others. What D’Ettorre didn’t know then was that he would be one of many deaf and hard-of-hearing people hired by MAPCO owners Rick and Les Goldstein.

They provide their deaf and hard-of-hearing employees with Blackberry phones to communicate the tasks for the day instead of having to read lips.

“We just look for good employees who are hard-working and can do the job no matter who they are,” said Rick Goldstein, CEO and president, the third generation of the family-owned business, which employs 150 people and has operated in the area since the Depression.

“We don’t think of people as hearing impaired because that shouldn’t be a factor,” he said. “And with the Blackberry phones, technology has removed any barriers.”

Easing back into the work environment, D’Ettorre started in maintenance, cleaning cars, cutting grass and salting the road. The first couple of years went smoothly before an accident jeopardized whether he would work or even walk again.

During the fall of 2007, he was summoned to a parking lot to jump a battery on a customer’s stalled vehicle. After he completed the job, a car hit him on his way back to the airport.

“I stayed home for six months to get better,” said D’Ettorre. “But I got bored ... so I called and told them I wanted to go back to work.”

Five years ago, the company introduced a valet parking service at the airport. D’Ettorre became one of the first members of the new program. He wears a hearing aid for when clients need valet service and they discuss when they will pick up their cars.

Diligent as he’s always been since his days at Kodak, D’Ettorre, who was nominated last year for Employee of the Year, eventually got promoted to lead trainer and supervisor of new valets. He realizes that few business owners can see through a person’s disability. “I’m hard-of-hearing, but that doesn’t make me handicapped to Rick,” said D’Ettorre. “They just care about everyone who works for them and they don’t discriminate no matter who you are. All we ask for is a chance to be great employees.”

D’Ettorre began singing the praises of MAPCO, telling friends like Ron Smithski about the employment prospect. Smithski, who was born deaf and has two grown deaf daughters, wanted a chance to work at a business where he wouldn’t be judged or held back because he is deaf.

“I work for Rick most of the time and I really want to thank him for hiring a few deaf people and show we can do the job,” said Smithski, 68, of Chili, who started working two months after D’Ettorre.

Charles Percey heard that several of his former Kodak friends were working at MAPCO and wanted to join the gang.

“They all seemed to be having so much fun,” said Percey, 69, of Chili, who became deaf at nine months. “I’m happy here and I enjoy the people I work with.”

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