

Celebrating Progressive Employers and Capable Employees: Holiday Inn South Winnipeg

By Sylvia Jansen

The chefs in any hotel restaurant kitchen need to prepare beautiful meals for dining room guests and for banquets. Like their guests, they rely on meticulous preparation and clean-up by the team in the kitchen. At the Holiday Inn South Winnipeg, one staff person who keeps things running right is Shirley, who lives with a learning disability.

A supported employment agency linked Shirley with the hotel about two years ago, and helped organize her move to the kitchen team. In that short time she has won an 'employee of the month' award for exceptional service. She does dishes, assists in food preparation, and helps clean the kitchen equipment. Her dependability, great personality and high level of work ethic have made her indispensable.

Executive Chef Eldon Brink has an easy time recommending that employers creatively find a fit to hire persons with disabilities: "If you can hire someone who will give 150%, who will never be late, who works hard and is always happy, why would you refuse that person?" he asks.

Shirley's work has been such a success that the hotel has found a good fit for other persons with disabilities. Working with the agency, the Holiday Inn Winnipeg South now employs eight persons with disabilities in various departments, including front-line guest services.

Shirley works full time, five days a week. And how does she cope with doing the toughest job in the kitchen? "I am never tired when I go home," she says. "I like my co-workers and I love my job!"

"What more can an employer ask for?" says Chef Eldon. His advice: "Don't look at the disability. Look at the possibilities."



Chef Eldon Brink with Shirley Photo: Lisa Waldner

Connecting Employers and People

It's about good business. When people with disabilities are connected with the right employer and the right kind of work, everyone succeeds. Many employers find that a small re-arranging of duties can make a big difference, and they rely on supported employment agencies to help. The agencies find good matches between people and employers, they help with training, and they provide ongoing support to employee and employer. All agency services are without cost to the employer. The agency that works with Shirley is **Premier Personnel, (204) 949-1474, www.premierpersonnel.ca**.

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