Making the Move

Relocation services try to ease way as new employees come to town

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by Adam Goldstein

A Colorado Realtor recently placed a newcomer from Chicago in a sleek, suburban neighborhood. The community, with its cookie-cutter houses and neat, geometric layout, is far from the bustle of the city.

For some, the area is a peaceful alternative from the headaches of downtown living.

But the newcomer found it to be stifling.

"There are no trees, no racial diversity. They really wanted to be in a racially diverse neighborhood," said Pam Horner, a friend of the newcomer and a resident of the Park Hill neighborhood off Colfax. "Right now, she can't afford to move out. She comes and stays with me a lot because she loves [my] neighborhood."

As the head of Your Colorado Connection LLC (YCC), Horner tries to prevent such domestic mismatches. YCC is a relocation service that specializes in connecting prospective residents to a suitable community, working on behalf of employers to properly place new workers.

YCC serves as a personal resource for new arrivals by providing extensive tours of neighborhoods and giving a detailed background on an area's schools, demographics, economy and crime stats. Although she's a one-woman company, Horner enlists a wide array of professionals, from Realtors to historians, to take care of the details and make Colorado seem like home.

"Mine is definitely a program where I introduce the state and introduce the city," she said.

Horner's main focus for her clients is personal. She uses detailed questionnaires to find neighborhoods that will make her client most comfortable and, thus, most effective as an employee. She also helps with basic services, such as setting up a state driver's license, finding a barber, and arranging for telephone, electric and water services.

Based on demands as specific as the age of the home or the presence of pets, Horner assembles individualized packets that detail various Colorado neighborhoods. Leaving such issues as real estate to her hired pros, Horner focuses on making the client and their family feel comfortable in their new surroundings.

YCC features three programs aimed at national and international employees. For $75 an hour, the client will receive a one-day customized tour of Colorado neighborhoods and a biannual newsletter. Tour stops include schools and places of worship.

For $599, YCC offers the tour and a wider range of long-term services. These include helping to relocate elderly relatives and finding job opportunities for a spouse or partner.

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For four years, Horner, a Colorado native, lived in Hamburg and helped incoming American employees transition to the German culture, taking care of everyday details such as trash pickup and telephone services.

She returned to the United States in 1991 and received her real estate license, eventually landing a job with Metro Brokers. After nearly 20 years in the real estate and relocation industry, Horner, 50, started her own business.

"What I loved about real estate was the people and their families," she said. "I was more involved in the relocation process than I was in the real estate part of it; I just enjoyed it more."

Nearly two years after venturing out on her own, Horner is making steady progress in an industry that can be fickle. As the Colorado economy fluctuates, the relocation industry follows its lead.

Horner, as well as other relocation professionals, are hopeful, after a lull during which some companies moved employees out of the state.

"What I've been seeing in the past few years is more people moving out," said Pamela Trapp, relocation director for The Kentwood Co. "Ever since 9/11, corporate relocation has slowed tremendously."

Still, some Colorado industries are growing, which should help the relocation industry.

Ronnell Richmond owns Prestige Corporate Relocation, a Denver company that specializes in office relocation. He said the appearance of new hospitals can help the lagging relocation industry.

"There is a large niche in the health care industry right now," he said.

Mining has had similar growth in employment in the past five years. Kerry Hogan is director of human resources for Atlas Copco, a Swedish-based mining company with division headquarters in Denver.

"There's been a lot of growth in this industry," she said. "There are a lot of management positions here in Denver."

Copco has used YCC to relocate employees from overseas, bringing them in from as far away as Shanghai. Horner's community-based approach helps reduce culture shock and smooth the transition to a new country.

"It's a matter of finding bilingual education and getting them in touch with the community," Hogan said.

Colorado's Office of Demography estimated that 32,000 people will migrate to the state in 2006, up from approximately 27,000 in both 2004 and 2005. As employers begin to re-invest in Colorado, Horner will be there to make the transition easier for the newcomers.

"[I want] to take care of everything so that these people can go straight to work and not have to worry about whether they're in the wrong neighborhood," she said. "They don't have to worry about that now that they're starting to work."