

# The Salt Lake Tribune

## Pro-diversity group works to make Utah more appealing to out-of-state professionals

By John Keahey

The Salt Lake Tribune

July 11, 2010 12:00AM

Even as the meaning of diversity in the workplace is evolving, a coalition of the Salt Lake Valley's biggest companies is working to help make Utah employers more attractive to outsiders.

Diversity in business hiring isn't confined to issues of color anymore. Companies once kept only a count of nonwhites — how many blacks, Asians, and so on. Some even had unspoken quotas, giving hiring preference to people of color just to showcase their commitment to diversity.

That trend is passé, business leaders say. Now many companies are exploring ways to broaden the scope of diversity. That in turn aids the coalition in providing resources that might help break down "the stigmas associated with moving to Utah."

"It is not simply a rainbow of different-colored faces anymore," said Salt Lake City attorney Roger Tsai, a board member of the Utah Diversity Community Connections, which represents more than two dozen top employers, ranging from the University of Utah to American Express. Its mission is to address the problem that many Utah employers have in drawing young, educated professionals to relocate to Utah.

"There's a different [approach] here. It could be religious diversity or the fact that [potential new hires] come from foreign countries" or that someone is disabled or gay, Tsai said..

One local company that has put the broader view into action with good results is O.C. Tanner Co., whose recently retired vice president of human resources took the definition a step further. Kay Jorgenson's commitment to diversity included promoting more women to high-level management jobs, and hiring men for once-traditional women's jobs and vice versa.

This has resulted in males taking on secretarial roles and women moving into tool-and-die work.

O.C. Tanner's approach of making work force diversity second nature as opposed to forcing quotas not only makes it a model for other companies, Tsai said, but it also led his group to recently honor O.C. Tanner



Francisco Kjolseth | The Salt Lake Tribune Salt Lake City - OC Tanner won an award for its efforts to create diversity within its work force as numerous countries are represented throughout the departments. Diversity in this sense goes beyond color of skin; it involves gender, gay/lesbian/transgender issues, countries of origin, different philosophies, religion and otherwise, etc.

with its first Employer Diversity Award for companies with more than 500 workers. (Park City-based Marriott Summit Watch won in the under-500 category.)

For Jorgenson, her company's award marked a milestone on a long journey.

In her 35 years with the recognition-symbols firm that creates "emblematic jewelry," she helped build a 1,700-member work force with "a diversity of people and cultures, along with different backgrounds and education levels." She didn't keep statistics on racial breakdowns but noted that 59 countries were represented and 63 languages spoken among Tanner's employees.

"That diversity, and the kinds of views everyone brings with them from different parts of the world, help us look at every situation in a variety of ways," she said. "These people are becoming supervisors, managers, directors."

She recalls what it was like when she first arrived, as a personnel assistant, in the mid-'70s. Her experience at O.C. Tanner then was similar to what was going on at most companies — in Utah and elsewhere.

"When I came, it was very traditional. There were few people of color, and all the executives were men, and all the secretaries were women," she recalled.

As the 1980s dawned, "we started seeing job applicants from Cambodia and Vietnam, and we started interviewing a few. We found in these groups very committed people. We hired them, and pretty soon others came from their communities and from other refugee groups."

Jorgenson, who retired last week, said it took until the latter part of the 1980s "before people started getting comfortable" with the changes.

"It was a different time. Managers resisted the complexities of dealing with people who couldn't speak English well. There were anonymous letters in suggestion boxes asking how we could hire someone from another country when people here needed jobs.

"Eventually, we became known as a company that offers jobs to diverse people. It has become second nature."

Tsai said his group's goal is to use these examples as a springboard for helping other companies learn about the benefits of a diverse work force and discover how to develop one of their own. By providing advisers and other resources to firms large and small that want to expand their commitment to diversity, the group hopes to reach its broader goal of attracting skilled, educated workers to Utah.

"We're trying to deal with the systemic problem of, 'What are the stigmas associated with moving to Utah?'" he said.

In years past, one of the great recruiting draws to pull in out-of-staters was the Wasatch Front's world-class ski areas. "Today, there has to be more than that," Tsai said, adding that potential employees need to feel a sense of inclusiveness and acceptance.

Once achieved, "there are those who see the potential in Salt Lake City. We could be a Denver, a San Francisco, a Phoenix" — all cities with great diversity in their residents and work forces.

Coalition member Rio Tinto is the parent company of Kennecott Utah Copper and Kennecott Land.

Michael Devolld, head of human resources for Kennecott Utah Copper, has seen firsthand the strength that work force diversity provides.

“The real value is the diversity in thinking. It helps to eliminate blind spots for us,” Devolld said, noting that success begets success.

“As a global company, we have quite a few opportunities for people from outside the company to come here. Typically mines are not located close to major metropolitan areas,” and the opportunity to live in a desirable place like Salt Lake City and work in a job they were trained for is hard to pass up, he said.

“We have good success at certain levels, like recruiting women into professional ranks. It’s harder to bring them into, say, the operator and maintenance trades, but we don’t give up in that regard. It just helps us get better.”

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