



Rural America's Two Rivers Office Moves Downstairs

Company offers alternative to offshore outsourcing

By Cindy Hodgson • Herald Times Reporter • January 12, 2010

TWO RIVERS — The struggling economy of the last year hasn't hurt Rural America Onshore Sourcing, which opened an office in Two Rivers in January 2009, according to its CEO, Christopher Hytry Derrington.

"We're booming," he said.

The Two Rivers office is located at 1413 22nd St., just east of Pizza Hut. The company recently moved to the basement, where there is more space and room to expand.

Rural America Onshore Sourcing, previously called Rural America IT, is a business process outsourcing company that was launched in August 2008. The company provides services such as market research, data processing and Web design.

It employs people in rural areas, many of whom work from home.

By using lower-cost rural labor, it aims to provide an alternative to expensive urban vendors or offshore outsourcing, which is the practice of hiring overseas companies to do such work.

Offshore outsourcing offers low costs up front but often comes with hidden costs, such as communication barriers and quality control problems, according to Hytry Derrington.

He said he thinks his company is the sort that could thrive in any economy.

When finances are tight, companies are looking for new, lower cost vendors, and when business is good they may outgrow their vendors or their ability to handle the work in-house.

Expansion

Rural America already had offices in Ohio and Kentucky when Hytry Derrington opened the office in Two Rivers. A year ago, he said his goal was to have offices in 18 states by the end of 2011. Since then, Rural America has expanded to one additional state, Indiana, and Hytry Derrington now said his goal is to be in 22 states or regions by the end of 2011, including eight by June.

Each state or region will have a state headquarters office, plus various business development centers where home-based workers will come together occasionally. In Wisconsin, he proposes centers to be located in River Falls, Wausau, Janesville, Eau Claire and Ashland.



Carolyn Mabbitt, director of interactive marketing for Rural America Onshore Sourcing, works at the Two Rivers office where she focuses on using social media to market Rural America and its clients. (Cindy Hodgson/HTR)

He aims to have 50 employees in the Two Rivers area by 2014. Right now, he has three who work at the TR office, one who will start there soon, and four who work from their homes in eastern Wisconsin.

Hytry Derrington continues to live in Ohio and visits the Two Rivers office during one or two weeks each month. He owns property south of Manitowoc, but his plans to move here with his wife, Renee, last summer were put on hold when he couldn't sell his house. They plan to break ground on a new home on their property here in April and then he will spend two or three weeks per month at the Two Rivers location.



(Cindy Hodgson/HTR)

Employees

Carolyn Mabbitt has worked for Rural America since November 2008. She moved to Two Rivers from Michigan at the end of June to become director of interactive marketing.

"I understand the concept of people working virtually," said Mabbitt, who previously did freelance work as an off-site administrative assistant.

Working on her own, she found herself unable to compete with the low costs of overseas companies. Rural America is able to offer prices in between those of overseas companies and expensive urban vendors.

"I believe very much in the concept of what they're trying to create," she said.

Mabbitt focuses on marketing through social media, both for Rural America and for its clients. She uses Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, and she even has made YouTube videos for a diamond importer.

Mabbitt called herself a "city girl" and said she's never lived in a community as small as Two Rivers. She came here from Waterford, Mich., which has a population of nearly 74,000.

"It's been quite a change, but it's been a wonderful change," she said.

She shared an example of small-town friendliness. She had been in Two Rivers for three days when her car wouldn't start. A neighbor came over and gave her the keys to his vehicle and allowed her to use it.

"It's like that everywhere," she said, referring to her new community.

Unlike with Mabbitt, the virtual world is new to Sammie McDonald, director of human resources. McDonald has experience in human resources, office management and accounting. She is responsible for keeping Rural America's Web site up-to-date, recruiting employees and handling the finances.

McDonald works from the Two Rivers office and said she wouldn't be interested in working from home.

Julie Berglund, on the other hand, enjoys working from her home in Menasha as a Web and graphic designer. She was a freelance designer for four years before signing on with Rural America, and she is enjoying the camaraderie with her co-workers. They're in contact over the phone and via e-mail, and they get together monthly at the Two Rivers office.

"It's been very nice to be able to work virtually ... with the team," she said.

Berglund said working in her own space is comfortable, and she can be flexible in terms of the hours she works.

When she worked as a freelancer, she spent a lot of time on tasks like sales and billing that weren't connected to the design work she actually wanted to be doing.

"They're a good company," she said about Rural America. "I'm having a lot of fun, actually, working with the team again."