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DON MACKINNON, CANWEST NEWS SERVICES

Arlene Lorico, who trained as a nurse in the Philippines, struggled to get her qualifications recognized in Canada until Providence Health Care hired and assisted her.

Diverse staff gives company an edge

BY IRIS WINSTON

Supporting foreign-born employees is a natural aspect of being "on the cutting edge", according to Pascale Alpha, global communications director for CAE Inc.

Montreal-based CAE provides simulation and modelling technologies as well as training for defence and civil aviation industry and depends on employees from 60 countries who speak more than 90 languages to stay ahead of the game.

"(CAE) is like the United Nations ... We are not only physically all over the world, but our staff is also very diverse," says Mr. Alpha. "We look for the best people from around the world because we always want to be on the cutting edge."

Founded 60 years ago, CAE has operations and training centres in 20 countries and serves customers in 100 countries. It was named one of the top 20 employers of new Canadians in a new competition created by Mediagroup Canada.

CAE uses a host of programs to help its foreign-born workforce adjust. In addition to recognizing foreign qualifications and offering relocation packages, the company provides free language classes in French and English at its in-house training centre. It also offers cultural training, financial support for additional education and help with tax preparation and the paperwork associated with obtaining work permits.

Associated Engineering Group Ltd., which, like all the companies named here, cracked the top 20 list, helps overseas recruits obtain work permits and become permanent residents. The Edmonton-based company, which has 14 offices between the West Coast and Ontario, provides language training in co-operation with Vancouver Community College.

"We and some other companies worked with the college to develop a language program specifically designed for technologists and engineers," says Lianna Mah, the company's manager of business development.

The engineering firm also supports new Canadian employees by linking them with professional associations and providing help settling into their new community, she says.

"When we bring people over, we want to make sure they settle well," says Mah. "So we meet them at the airport and provide them with temporary accommodation and a vehicle. If they have partners and children, we make sure they have a soft landing as well. We provide meals for a couple of days and toys for the kids. We want to make sure everyone is comfortable."

Manulife Financial Corporation has experienced great success hiring through Career Bridge, says Kathy Lockwood, vice-president of human resources and communications. Manulife has hired 24 interns through the program which prepares newcomers for the Canadian job market, says Lockwood.

"I sometimes find it easier to get the skills I'm looking for through new Canadians," she says. "In hiring new Canadians from various countries, you get a completely different perspective."

CAREER BRIDGE

Career Bridge is operated by the non-profit organization Career Edge, which has offices in Toronto and Vancouver. Mainly through internships, it aims to break the cycle of "no Canadian experience, no job — no job, no Canadian experience" for new Canadians.

www.careerbridge.ca

Help at hand for new Canadians

While recent immigrants often face barriers getting back into the careers they were trained for, many Canadian employers are striving to help them adapt, writes IRIS WINSTON.

Jorge Valencia has found his niche in Canada.

"I was very lucky," says Mr. Valencia, a software architect, who came to Canada from Mexico in 2001 on an exchange program with Université de Québec in Montreal.

During his studies, he was on three co-operative education assignments with CAE, which has been named one of Canada's top 20 employers of new Canadians. Before he completed his degree, the company hired him full time and helped him to advance his studies.

"I was allowed to take some working hours for my studies and CAE paid for my remaining courses from the moment I was hired," he says. "That was a big help because university fees for immigrants are very high."

The company's human resources department also helped him to obtain a work permit.

"They paid for that too and

helped me with all the processing and paperwork. CAE is a company that knows how to help employees and facilitate their adaptation when they come from outside," he says.

The 30-year-old says he hopes to stay with the company for the rest of his career.

"I really like my job. We work on projects all around the world and I have the opportunity to meet a lot of people from many places. I have even met customers from Spain a few times and have been able to take advantage of my native language."

The path to permanent employment in the Canadian workforce was not so smooth for Arlene Lorico.

Ms. Lorico came to Canada from the Philippines in 2002 under the live-in caregiver program. Despite a bachelor's degree in nursing from the Philippines and experience as a public health nurse, Lorico faced

difficulty obtaining recognition for her nursing qualifications.

Ms. Lorico completed the caregiver program's requirement that foreign employees work with a specific employer for two years before applying for permanent resident status. She also passed the licensing examination set by the College of Registered Nurses.

"But there were still some challenges to overcome," says 34-year-old Ms. Lorico, who is now a permanent resident of Canada and is applying for Canadian citizenship.

The College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia claimed she did not have the required 150 hours of nursing education needed to obtain a licence. Ms. Lorico appealed the decision and won, but faced still another obstacle. Potential employers balked at hiring her

because she lacked nursing experience in Canada.

Eventually, after a short time as a casual worker in long-term care, Providence Health Care — another company identified as one of the 20 best employers of new Canadians in the competition created by Mediagroup Canada — hired her.

"Providence is willing to accept foreign-trained nurses after they have taken a short training in Canada," says Ms. Lorico, who has now been with Canada's largest Catholic-owned health care organization for a year. "It has been a struggle, but I am now working as an RN in Canada, thanks to Providence."

The process was faster for audiologist Sandra Toms, who came to Canada from England in 2005.

"I was quite proactive and did

it in six months," says Ms. Toms. "I was lucky to be a hearing instrument practitioner as well as an audiologist in England, so I was able to approach the licensing board and they let me take the exam for B.C. It worked out really well for me, but it is very restrictive — my work permit is tied to my job — and B.C. is one of the most heavily licensed places in the world."

Although she handled most of the immigration and licensing requirements herself and was helped by the current shortage of audiologists in Canada, she says that Island Hearing Services, another of the 20 best employers of new Canadians, smoothed the way for her.

"Island Hearing sought permission to issue the work permit and they were willing to wait for all that to be sorted out," she says. "Their flexibility was really helpful."

Ms. Toms is now preparing to upgrade her work permit status and is applying for permanent residency in Canada.

"Island Hearing will also help me there by supporting my provincial nomination for the upgrading," she says.



'I was allowed to take some working hours for my studies and CAE paid for my remaining courses from the moment I was hired.'

JORGE VALENCIA

Immigrant Software architect employed at CAE, a top-20 employer of new Canadians

Competition helps cultivate immigrant labour force

Companies recognized for efforts to attract new Canadian workers

BY IRIS WINSTON

The changing face of Canada was the catalyst for a new national competition that recognizes the top 20 employers of new Canadians across the country.

Founded by Mediagroup Canada Inc., the contest is an outgrowth of the eight-year-old Canada's Top 100 Employers competition, which was the first spinoff from the company's popular Career Directory, now in its 16th edition.

Directory publisher Tony Meehan says most of the growth in the labour force is now coming from new Canadians, which makes this a good time to see how employers are reacting to changes in their workforce.

"Almost 100 per cent of the growth of the labour force in Toronto is from another country," he says. "That's reflected in the workforce in several other cities across Canada. Demographic replacement rates are much lower for the existing Canadian population. Employ-



- The Associated Engineering Group Ltd., Edmonton
- The Business Development Bank of Canada, Montreal
- CAE Inc., Saint-Laurent, Que.
- The Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, Toronto
- Christie Digital Systems Canada, Inc., Kitchener, Ont.
- Enbridge Inc., Calgary
- Ernst & Young LLP, Toronto
- i3DVR International Inc., Toronto

- Island Hearing Services, Victoria
- Keane Canada, Inc., Halifax
- KMPG LLP, Toronto
- Manulife Financial Corporation, Toronto
- MDS Nordion Inc., Ottawa
- Providence Health Care, Vancouver
- Replicon Inc., Calgary
- St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto
- The TD Bank Financial Group, Toronto
- The Toronto Transit Commission, Toronto
- The University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon
- Wardrop Engineering Inc., Winnipeg

ers are going to have to pay attention to this issue because it is one of the few growing sources of qualified people in Canada. And it's a resource that is being spectacularly underutilized right now. We wanted to see how employers were responding, who were doing specific programs to attract and help their new labour force."

The primary aim of the competition is to spread the word about best practices in hiring immigrant workers to encour-

age other companies to follow suit, he says.

The competition, which attracted more than 200 entries, charges no entry fee and offers no financial awards.

To apply for consideration, applicants for the Top 100 Employers competition simply fill out an additional section on their entry form. Responses to detailed questions about such topics as recognition of work experience and educational qualifications from other coun-

tries, language programs and follow-up verification provide a picture of the accommodation and support companies offered their employees. "We look at the kind of environment the employers create for new Canadians," says Mr. Meehan.

The Toronto Region Immigrant Employer Council, a sponsor of the contest, partnered with Mediagroup to determine the competition's criteria.

There were a number of similarities between the compa-