

# Business

RED WING / LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

## Finding jobs for the disabled

ProAct program is helping restock the local workforce

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RED WING — While the job market still isn't what it used to be, there have been signs that it's on the rebound. Jim Bohmbach is one of them.

The Red Wing native was recently hired by ProAct to help people with disabilities find employment throughout Goodhue County, while focusing mostly on Red Wing and Zumbrota. It's a position ProAct, which is based out of Eagan, has staffed in the past, but had found unnecessary during the economic recession.

Bohmbach has been employed for just over a month. He declined to say how many jobs he's helped physically and mentally handicapped people find thus far, but he acknowledged a recent success story with an emphatic fist pump. Sally Ogren, ProAct's Director of Programs, says the hardest part of Bohmbach's position is laying the

necessary groundwork.

"For people who aren't familiar or acquainted with people who have disabilities, it's just getting past the disability," she said. "Once we can do that, lots of times things just click. Frequently you can make a match, and employers are often surprised at how well it works out."

Bohmbach brings built-in credibility to the position of job developer. He managed human resources at Red Wing Shoe Company for a dozen years and worked with children with disabilities in the Red Wing School District prior to joining ProAct. He's also the head coach for the Winger baseball team, and assists with the football and girls hockey programs.

His well-established status in the community allows him to have open, constructive conversations with local businesses.

"The economy is not back, but everyone I talk to is very optimistic about ProAct and what we do," Bohmbach said. "It's a matter of getting them to think outside the box.

"(People with disabilities) can

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make a big difference for your company. They can keep payroll down, they show up on time and are excited to work, and they can improve a company's image by helping these people out."

Bohmbach typically works with 10 people at a time. He determines their skills and interests before helping them create or update their resumes. The final step is seeking a matching job for each person. It can be an arduous process, but it's a challenge he says he enjoys.

While ProAct has been flexible with Bohmbach's coaching sched-

ule — section playoffs start next Saturday — the new job has also forced him to consider his future. He finds it a little unusual to be coaching while no longer working with students all day. He's also been forced to push back practice time by about 90 minutes each day and leave work early for road games.

Still, he hopes to restock the work force by day and pile up the wins each night for years to come.

"I'm one of the luckiest guys in the world to be able to do this," he said.