

# Local firm helps others find the perfect employees

By Susan Chaves

Despite the sluggish economy, jobs are available ... and Maureen Mackey and Luisa Guasco are looking to fill those positions.

Co-partners of Mackey & Guasco Staffing Associates, the two women provide permanent

office support and human resource placements as well as temporary staffing services for both small businesses and large corporations.

"What we're best at is that we're good listeners," Mackey said. "We use that skill to match the company with the personality of the person."

They do that by not only getting to know the candidate but also by familiarizing themselves with the client (or company). Often, the pair will visit the firm, eat lunch at the cafeteria and talk to the employees.

"We talk to them on the phone, but going there is better," Guasco

said. "It gives you a feel for the culture and gives you a feel for the people who work there, which is helpful."

It is particularly helpful when filling a permanent position, Mackey said, since the chemistry between employer and hiree is needed to make things work long-term. The temporary division, which tends to be busier, focuses more on a person's skills.

"The person is only going to be there for a short time so a company will want someone who is competent in Excel or Microsoft Word or Power Point," Mackey added. "But we still try to understand the customer. I think that's what makes us successful."

That and the experience the two women share between them. A graduate of Pace University, Mackey is a 16-year veteran of the industry, having served for 13 years as vice president of Impact Personnel in Norwalk, which she co-founded in 1989.

She is also a member of the Southern Connecticut Chapter of the Society for Human Resource Management, currently heading up the organization's job bank and teaches interviewing techniques to the student chapter. She is a past vice president of programs for the National Human Resources Association.

Guasco began her career in human resources in 1983 at the Pittston Co., before entering the staffing industry four years ago as senior recruiter at Impact Personnel.

She is also a Pace University graduate and a past vice president of programs for the NHRA.

Last March, the pair left Impact Personnel and established their present company (with Mackey handling the sales and business development and Guasco dealing more with recruiting and operations) amidst a job market with an

8 percent unemployment rate. Still, they managed to turn a profit by August.

"I was a little nervous about the outcome, even though I turned a profit in six months at Impact, which was started during the recession," Mackey said. "But at that time I had no personal risks; now I have a husband, a son and a house."

Any anxiety was easily allayed, especially with a partner like Guasco, who Mackey describes as "really positive."

"Where I think the glass is half empty, Luisa sees it as half full," Mackey said.

However, they both saw Darien as the perfect location to set up their company as it puts them front and center to staff businesses in Stamford, Greenwich, Norwalk and Westport.

"We're very happy in Darien," Mackey said. "We're so lucky. I feel like we hit the lottery to get this place."

She still feels that way even though requests for full-time help is on the down slope of a wild roller coaster ride. In the late 1990s, when the dot.com craze was in full swing, Mackey and Guasco were receiving dozens of job orders. Now, they get about half of that — the same half that similar companies also get. Whoever places the prospective employee earns the commission.

"It's like a basketball game — seeing who gets to the end of the court fastest," Mackey said. "It's manic. The highs are high and the lows are low, but it's what keep you coming back."

The variety of positions does, too. Although they place mostly data entry clerks, human resource professionals and personal and executive assistants, Mackey and Guasco do a lot of temporary placement for people on welfare.

"We get people who work

staffing envelopes and work night jobs, up to those who get \$100,000 a year," Guasco said. "We see it all."

In the future they would like to do it all ... or at least do more. Their first priority is to set up a company website followed by organizing a series of seminars offering instruction on how to interview to how to put together a resume.

"Your resume is very important," Guasco said. "Your resume is what earns you an interview, so if you can't get your foot in the door, you're not going to get a job."

Not wanting to be misleading, she added that just because someone uses her and Mackey's services does not guarantee that person will get a job.

In fact, Mackey said about every 12th person gets placed. Presently, with the job market in a slouch, approximately three people a month get placed in permanent positions. The firm draws the majority of its weekly fees from the temporary job division, which finds employment for about 30 people a week.

"The permanent placements are gravy," said Guasco, explaining that they are an added bonus. "I liken it to an executive whose wife is a Realtor who sells a house or two every month ... gravy."

Gravy or not, the two women are confident they will survive the economic downturn because of their "top-notch customer service."

"We care about the clients and the candidates," Mackey said. "We make sure that what we do is 100 percent right. It's not like buying a dress that you can take home and return if you decide you don't like it. In this industry, if there are doubts, it's not going to work. So you have to make sure it does before you place someone."



**MATCH MAKERS** — Maureen Mackey, sitting, and Luisa Guasco help people find jobs by matching the culture of the prospective company with an individual's personality. (Darien Times/Susan Chaves photo)