

## SMALL BUSINESS

## Clients turn to them for help

## Family deals in leasing of employees

By DOUGLASS CROUSE  
STAFF WRITER

Robert, Jon, Brian and Dan Boffa will spend today as they do just about every day: hanging out with their dad, Bob Boffa Sr.

The Father's Day gathering won't involve office meetings, chats with small-business clients or any of the other tasks that keep their employee-leasing company running. But you can bet it won't be long before the Boffas talk business.

In the last four decades, the family has turned Personnel Coordinators Inc. in Elmwood Park into a \$150-million-a-year enterprise. Their forte: handling human-resource and payroll duties for businesses ranging from single-employee start-ups to international firms.

"We're essentially an invisible co-employer," Bob Boffa tells business owners. "We free you up to concentrate on what makes money for you."

For the Boffa brothers, PCI remains in one sense a mom-and-pop business — their mother, Barbara Murphy, works down the hall from their father, despite their divorce 22 years ago.

"She's their mother and always will be, so why do things the hard way?" Bob Boffa said.

Murphy, a human-resource administrator, says the two see eye-



The Boffa family owns Personnel Coordinators Inc. of Elmwood Park. With portrait of patriarch Eugene Boffa, from left: Bob Boffa Sr., his sons Jon, Daniel, Rob Jr. and Brian and their mom, Barbara Murphy.

to-eye on that point. "I think people mellow with age," she said.

Bob Sr.'s father, Eugene Boffa, laid the groundwork for PCI in 1961 when he and two partners launched Universal Coordinators Inc., which leased out commercial drivers. In 1969, Bob Sr. founded the company that eventually would employ his own four sons.

As a Professional Employer Organization, or PEO, Personnel Coordinators puts clients' employees on its own payroll and then leases them back. By "outsourcing" their workforce in that way, small-business owners can take advantage of benefits packages PCI is able to negotiate because of

its large employee network. Some business owners with no workers even lease themselves back to their own company.

PCI's duties are similar to those of a human-resource department: processing unemployment claims and withholding deductions, for instance. The company — which also handles labor relations for unions — has an in-house insurance agency, offers financial services and even conducts worker drug testing.

When a business signs up, a representative from PCI will sit down with employees to explain how the system works. In some cases, clients want their names on

checks — PCI includes them under its own name — or have other concerns.

Said Bob Boffa: "Some business owners say, 'Wouldn't I lose control of my people? How do I tell them I'm no longer their employer?'"

Employees themselves see virtually no difference, said Jon Boffa, 33, PCI's chief operating officer and labor attorney. "It doesn't change who an employer is, just by virtue of who is drawing checks, but rather who is ultimately responsible to fund it," he said.

PCI charges clients either a percentage of gross wages or a flat fee per check.

Joe Karol, owner of a Maaco franchise in Saddle Brook, has leased his employees and himself through PCI for the last three years. He pays a lower rate for certain state taxes because employees are part of PCI's large worker pool. The arrangement also saves him time.

"For one, we don't have to prepare all those silly tax returns that are due every month and every quarter," he said. "And if we get some employee that we fire and he takes me to court, they will handle the case for me."

When it began in the Nineties, employee leasing initially got a bad name — largely because some pioneer companies didn't have the financial wherewithal to pay employees' checks, the Boffas said.

Going with a PEO can ease a client's stress level when employees are scattered in states with different regulations. And when employees get laid off from one company, PCI often refers them to another company in the database.

In New Jersey, all PEOs must prove a minimum net worth and be recertified annually with an updated client list. And the guidelines are clear that responsibilities for workplace safety, workers' compensation and wage-and-hour requirements continue to fall on the client company.

"Our concern is to reinforce the fact that while you may be getting this simplified tax-filing process, you're not in any way changing the underlying employer-employee relationship," said David So-cowol, commissioner of the state Department of Labor and Work-force Development.

Many of the Boffas' clients come from Bergen County, where the entire family resides. Bob,

## Personnel Coordinators Inc., Elmwood Park

Founded: 1969

Employees: 35

Revenue: \$150 million (includes salaries and wages that flow through to clients' workers)

Clients: 500 companies with about 20,000 employees

Web site: pcihr.com

Advice: Remember that employees are the company's biggest assets. "Providing good benefits is always an excellent investment," says Bob Boffa Sr., president and CEO. "A lot of times, companies say they know this but don't practice it."

Brian and Jon even live on the same street in Woodcliff Lake.

Work-related inspiration, the Boffas find, often arises from those family situations. Years ago, Bob Boffa arrived home one night to find Murphy, then pregnant with Brian, having an especially tough day.

"You think you got labor problems?" she exclaimed, straining to stand straight. Once they were done laughing, Boffa persuaded Murphy to have her picture taken at a Fair Lawn photo studio.

Her rounded profile and clever comment became PCI's first advertisement.

E-mail: crouse@northjersey.com

## THE WEEK AHEAD

## Monday

Metropolitan Real Estate Investors Association, "Environmental Issues: Deal Makers or Breakers," 6:30 p.m., Hilton Hotel, GSP Exit 131A, Woodbridge. Speaker: Lawyer Stuart J. Lieberman. Cost: \$20. Call 201-818-8913, or visit biztobizcafe.com.

## Tuesday

Biz to Biz Café, meeting, 7 p.m., 18 Washington St., Morristown. Sponsor: Ameriprise Financial. Cost: \$20. Call 201-818-8913, or visit biztobizcafe.com.

Palisades Financial, "Real Estate and the Economy," 8 to 10 a.m., Marriott at Glenpointe, Teaneck. Speaker: Joseph Seneca of Rutgers University. Call Michael J. LaCosta, 908-781-6420.

Biz@Net, meeting, 7:30 a.m., Riga Restaurant, Route 46 east, Fairfield. Speaker: John Demetrius, CPA. First-timers get free breakfast. Call Paul Roberts, 201-934-4573, or visit bizatnet.org.

## Wednesday

Bergen County chapter, New Jersey Association of Women Business Owners, meeting and awards ceremony, 5:45 to 9 p.m., Crowne Plaza, 601 From Road, Paramus. Honorees: Marian Gordon of Imprint on Us and Ann Ciavaglia of A New Journey. Cost: \$35 to \$45. Call 201-444-8773, ext. 3, or visit njawbobergen.org.

North Jersey Business Network, meeting, noon, The Restaurant, 140 Prospect Ave., Hackensack. Call Rick Bernstein, 973-962-4444.

American Association of Individual Investors, meeting, 5:30 to 9 p.m., Ste. Jean Baptiste Community Center, 184 E. 76th St., Manhattan. Cost: \$25. Call 212-386-3703, or visit aaii.com.

At the Top chapter, Business Network International, meeting 7 a.m., Land and Sea Diner, 20-12 Fair Lawn Ave. Speaker: Real estate lawyer Jill Dolinsky. Cost: \$9, including breakfast. Call Joseph Pearson, 551-486-4177.

Crossroads chapter, Business Network International, meeting, 7 a.m., Sheraton Hotel, Route 17 north, Mahwah. Cost: \$20, including breakfast. Call 201-694-6745, or visit bni.crossroads.com.

## Thursday

Business Referral Partnership Group, meeting, 7:30 a.m., Matthew's Colonial Diner, Waldwick. Brian Katz will discuss title insurance. First-timers get free breakfast. Call George Hewitt, 201-417-7167.

New Jersey Economic Development Authority, "Earned Income Ventures," 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., Morris County Chamber of Commerce, 25 Lindsley Drive, Morristown. Free. Call 609-292-9279, or e-mail eti@njeda.com.

## Upcoming events:

Mahwah Regional Chamber of Commerce, meeting, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., Tuesday, June 26, Kearny Federal Savings Bank, 201 Old Tappan Road, Old Tappan. Cost: \$15 to \$25. Call 201-529-5566.

At the Top chapter, Business Network International, meeting, 7 to 8:30 a.m., Wednesday, June 27, Land and Sea Diner, 20-12 Fair Lawn Ave., Speaker: Certified public accountant Jeff Lovas. Cost: \$9, including breakfast. Call Joseph Pearson, 551-486-4177.

Send information to: Business News This Week, 150 River St., Hackensack, NJ 07601. E-mail lapidus@northjersey.com or fax (201) 457-2505.

## ON THE JOB: LIBERTY SCIENCE CENTER

By DOUGLASS CROUSE  
STAFF WRITER

Liberty Science Center in Jersey City, the most visited museum in New Jersey, reopens next month with a new look. When it does, visitors will get a hands-on illustration of the kind of skill and sweat that went into its \$109 million expansion.

Skyscraper! — the largest of the permanent exhibitions — will highlight tall-building designs specifically and construction work in general.

One of the exhibit's "zones" features a simulated construction site where visitors can operate a crane, test the properties of steel and concrete, and walk along an elevated I-beam. Another part will include live feeds from construction projects around the world.

The 12,800-square-foot exhibit and the spotlight it shines on the trades have thrilled New Jersey's building community.

"This is going to be a tremendous resource for school districts and parents to understand the benefits of a career in the construction industry," said Jill Schiff, membership services director for the Building Contractors Association of New Jersey.

"We want kids to experience it themselves and say, 'Hey, I really like this! I could weld iron. I can use a jackhammer. I can lay brick.'"

The exhibit will also feature a hard hats wall with recorded on-the-job stories from young and veteran workers.

"We provided them with 18 people from New Jersey and they're using every one of them," said Christine Nelson of the Construction Industry Advancement Program of New Jersey, a consultant to the museum. "They're all real storytellers."

Andrea Giorgi Bocker, resident engineer for work on the George Washington Bridge, talked about the importance of using safety gear during lead removal and painting of the bridge.

"I talked about how I hit my head all the time with the hard hat on," she said.

"If I hadn't had it on, some of the times I would have needed stitches."

Trade groups have supported the exhibit financially as well, with a national ironworkers group donating \$1 million, said Wayne LaBar, vice president in charge of exhibitions and theaters.

LaBar said the exhibit was seen as an ideal fit for a slice of New Jersey with great views of not only Manhattan but its own tall buildings.

"The Jersey City skyline is probably one of the fastest-growing skylines in the country," LaBar said.

"Many of us go to work in Manhattan and skyscrapers are an essential part of our area. As a means of increasing urban density, skyscrapers will probably play a central role in fostering global stewardship."

The center's doors open to the public on July 19 after several years of planning and 22 months of work. Officials expect more than 1 million visitors in the first year.

With a pending merger in the union world, sheet metal workers stand to gain about 80,000 brothers and sisters.

The United Transportation Union, the Cleveland-based representative for rail and transit workers in the U.S. and Canada, and sheet metal work-



One of the features of the newly expanded Liberty Science Center in Jersey City is Skyscraper!, above and below, a permanent exhibit that gives visitors a close-up look at building design and a skyscraper construction site, where museum-goers can walk on an I-beam and operate a crane.



ers see a marriage as a means of boosting bargaining power.

The transportation union would become an independent unit of the 150,000-member Sheet Metal Workers International Association, based in Washington, D.C. The sheet metal workers' executive council voted on Wednesday to approve the merger, which will create the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART).

UTU hopes to benefit from the sheet metal workers' organizing expertise and strength. The new union also would gain lobbying clout, becoming the seventh-largest union political action committee, according to the UTU.

"I think this will strengthen both sides and the overall union movement," said Joe Demark, president and business agent for Sheet Metal Workers International Association Local 25 in Carlstadt.

The merger would go into effect Jan. 1, once it is approved by the full UTU membership.

In another vote last week, a proposed state board of examiners for heating, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigerating contractors moved closer to reality.

The legislation would establish a nine-member board of HVAC professionals and state representatives to license contractors and individual tradesmen.

State Assembly members passed their version of the bill 74-5 on Monday. The Senate bill remains in the commerce committee. Marc Schrieks, chief of staff for Sen. Joseph Coniglio, a Democrat from Paramus and the bill's sponsor, said a vote by the full Senate could come by month's end.

"I don't see it as heavy lift to get it done before the summer break," he said.