

SUCCESS STORY

## INTERNATIONAL HOUSE OF PANCAKES

### Emphasizing Ability Impacts the Bottom Line

*Frank Coombs is a perfect example for employers across the region who are finding it's good business to hire motivated and capable workers with disabilities.*

- Earl Copus, CEO, Melwood

#### *Key Lessons Learned*



Make use of effective local resources for employees with disabilities which may offer job-coaching and other workplace supports to ease the adjustment of the employee, coworkers, customers, etc.

When planning accommodations, consider the feasibility of reallocating tasks among workers to make best use of each worker's strengths while minimizing the impact of their limitations.

#### *Company History*

IHOP Corporation traces its roots back to the opening of the first International House of Pancakes restaurant in 1958 in Toluca Lake, a suburb of Los Angeles, California. Within four years the number of units had increased to nearly 50, with many of the restaurants being operated by franchisees.

In 1961 the company became publicly traded under the name International House of Pancakes. In 1976 the name was officially changed to IHOP.

In the 1990s, IHOP franchises had increased from 490 to over 900. IHOP brand awareness exceeds 98 percent, making IHOP one of the most popular family restaurant chains in America. Average sales per restaurant exceeded one million dollars in 1993. System-wide sales exceeded one billion dollars in 1998. The company was recognized in 1992, 1998, 1999 and 2002 on the Forbes Magazine 200 Best Small Companies list, which highlights the hottest growth prospects in American business. In November 2001 the company opened its 1000th location in Layton, Utah.

While many things have changed since 1958, a key strategy of recruiting, developing and supporting franchisees has remained a constant. Franchisees are the company's primary customer.

#### *Help from Local Resources of Employees with Disabilities*

Before purchasing his Forestville IHOP franchise, Frank Coombs worked at another IHOP near the Kennedy Institute, an organization that serves children and

#### **Employer Assistance & Recruiting Network**

6858 Old Dominion Drive Suite 250 McLean 22101  
1-866-EARN-NOW, V/TTY [www.earnworks.com](http://www.earnworks.com)

SUCCESS STORY

## INTERNATIONAL HOUSE OF PANCAKES

### Emphasizing Ability Impacts the Bottom Line

adults with disabilities, in Washington, D.C. While Coombs believed hiring people with disabilities made good business sense, he found his manager less enthusiastic about it. Coombs resolved that when he got his own business, he would do things differently.

In April, 2000, Frank Coombs purchased his new franchise in Forestville, MD from IHOP Corporation. That same year, he hired his first employee through Melwood, a non-profit organization working with persons with developmental disabilities. Estevamico Evans (Esti for short) proved himself a model employee, and two more employees were hired from Melwood: Mary Shorter and Niki Linsey.

*Frank Coombs is a perfect example for employers across the region who are finding it's good business to hire motivated and capable workers with disabilities,*

Said Melwood President/CEO Earl Copus. Coombs has hired 25 workers with disabilities since 2000, through the Washington DC-area Kennedy Institute and the Rock Creek Foundation, as well as Melwood, which provided on-site job coaching to help new employees learn job duties and adjust to work routines. Coombs' goal is to have 20% of his jobs filled by people with disabilities. Currently 6 of the restaurant's 90 employees have dis-

abilities, including Kim, who is so glad to have her job that she gives everyone a hug as she leaves work each day.

### *Employees with Disabilities are Good for Business*

Coombs knows from experience that hiring people with disabilities is good for his business. Breanna Bland, who has cerebral palsy, audits waitresses' checks. Just knowing that Breanna is doing this helps each waitress to be more conscientious in writing checks. Coombs estimates that Breanna saves the restaurant about \$420 in check errors each week.

Accommodating employees with significant disabilities has not presented a problem for Coombs, who "carved" out a job for Bernard, who uses prostheses on his hands and legs. Bernard works independently, rolling silverware for place settings. Neither Bernard nor any of Coombs' other employees with disabilities have required any investment in accommodations.

Regular customers look forward to seeing Kim, Breanna, and Bernard on the job. They and Coombs' other employees with disabilities have proven to be loyal, long-term workers in an industry where high employee turnover is the norm. Training each new employee costs IHOP about \$1000, according to Coombs. He also

#### Employer Assistance & Recruiting Network

6858 Old Dominion Drive Suite 250 McLean 22101  
1-866-EARN-NOW, V/TTY [www.earnworks.com](http://www.earnworks.com)

SUCCESS STORY

## INTERNATIONAL HOUSE OF PANCAKES

### Emphasizing Ability Impacts the Bottom Line

notes that hiring employees with disabilities has not affected employee safety or insurance costs.

#### *Getting the Word Out*

Coombs' restaurant was recognized as Private Industry Employer of the Year for



Forestville IHOP restaurant owner Frank Coombs holds his "Private Industry Employer of the Year" award from Melwood.

(Left to Right:) Rick Hayes, Manager; Frank Coombs, Owner; Joan Coombs, Restaurant Human Resources Director; Melwood employees Mary Shorter, Estevamico Evans and Niki Linsey. — Photo courtesy of Melwood

2001 by Melwood. Customers see the award behind the register as they enter

and leave the Donnell Drive restaurant. In June, 2003, Frank Coombs received the 2003 Chester A. Troy, Sr. Employer of the Year Award by the Maryland Governor's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities. In April, 2004, a Washington Post Magazine cover story featured Coombs' strategies for hiring employees with disabilities at his IHOP restaurant.

Frank Coombs' success began with a resolution to run his business differently from other restaurants where he encountered many of the stereotypical attitudes toward hiring people with disabilities. He knows from experience these are untrue.

*They're dependable – very dependable,*

Says Coombs. With over 900 other IHOP managers out there, there should be many opportunities for others to duplicate Coombs' success.

#### *Share Your Story*

**If you have a success story you would like to share, please email us at:**

**[earn@earnworks.com](mailto:earn@earnworks.com).**

#### Employer Assistance & Recruiting Network

6858 Old Dominion Drive Suite 250 McLean 22101  
1-866-EARN-NOW, V/TTY [www.earnworks.com](http://www.earnworks.com)