

SUCCESS STORY

## PILLSBURY WINTHROP SHAW PITTMAN LLP

### Law Firm Enriches Workplace with Employees with Disabilities

*Our environment is creative and innovative. People with disabilities by default are very creative and knowledgeable about a variety of issues, because they have to be in their everyday lives.*

Britta Stromeyer, Non-legal Recruitment Coordinator, Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP

#### Key Lessons Learned



Take advantage of cultural characteristics within the organization that support diversity and openness to accommodating workers with diverse abilities.

Offer internships as a low-risk opportunity to explore whether there is a good fit between the organization and individuals with disabilities.

Implement job accommodations for disabled employees that are also advantageous to non-disabled coworkers.

Take advantage of experience and problem-solving insight by the employee with the disability in exploring accommodation options.

#### Company Background

Formed by the April 2005 merger of Pillsbury Winthrop LLP and Shaw Pittman LLP, our firm has 900 lawyers in 16 locations, including global centers for capital markets, energy, and technology.

#### People-oriented Corporate Culture

Equal opportunity employment is

*a corporate commitment, and it's also a personal commitment from each of us working here*

Explains Britta Stromeyer, who supervised the recruitment of all non-legal staff from 2000 to 2005. She describes the company's culture as people-oriented, and focused on equal opportunity employment including disability.

This helped Stromeyer to "think out of the box," when she faced low availability of applicants to staff during the firm's continuous growth in 2001.

#### Casting a Wider Net for Qualified Candidates

Reaching out to new sources for candidates, Stromeyer discovered EARN by

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scrolling through a directory of recruitment resources. This was simply part of Stromeier's broad approach to use of recruiting resources, including the Department of Defense Transition Program, Monster, etc.



Britta Stromeier, Non-legal  
Recruitment Coordinator

Stromeier found success with EARN. She also found that the firm's culture adapted readily to employees with hearing impairments. Julie was hired as a conflicts assistant in 2002 and promoted to conflicts coordinator in 2003. Julie notes,

*Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman, since day one, has always given enormous respect for my needs. Here, I am granted full autonomy on the job - thanks to the*

*accommodations that they have provided. This allows me to feel more equal to my co-workers.*



Julie, at left, communicates with her supervisor Rabiya via email, instant messaging, notes, and American Sign Language (ASL).

Mohamed was also hired through EARN, first as a temporary employee, and later full-time. Mohamed adds,

*Thanks to EARN, I was hired quickly by Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman. I noticed that Pillsbury is very creative and enthusiastic to include diversity among their employees. For example, ASL [American Sign Language] classes were offered to non-legal and legal staff, which enabled other employees to communicate with me on a basic level.*

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Mohamed, shown at left, talks over his job assignments via sign language with James, his supervisor.

Classes in ASL and deaf culture for employees, at a very reasonable cost, were initially provided to those who worked directly with Julie and Mohamed. Soon, however, other employees signed up for the classes. Sign language courses are now offered throughout Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP, and employees are more aware of and interested in disability as part of everyday life. The staff realized that the use of pagers, instant messaging, interpreter services for meetings would aid productivity for everyone, including Julie and Mohamed.

### *Hiring an Employee with a Wheelchair "Opened our Eyes"*

Since then, Stromeyer has relied on EARN as the primary source for recruiting individuals with disabilities, as part of the law firm's dedication to hiring people with disabilities. Most recently, Stromeyer connected with EARN to recruit Dina, the firm's newest marketing assistant, who brings a background in graphics and administrative support to her new role.

Dina started work just one week after accepting the job offer. In early January, 2004, Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman posted details of the job opening with EARN. EARN immediately sent the announcement to nearly 40 participating employment service providers in the D.C. metro area. EARN soon learned area providers were finding matches for the position. By February, Stromeyer informed EARN that two candidates referred through the EARN provider network had been interviewed and one was hired for the job: "She has the passion and interest to work in the marketing department. We're excited to have her join us. I think she will be terrific in that role," Stromeyer said.

As a wheelchair user, Dina helped Pillsbury understand ways to improve

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accessibility of their facilities. "No employer has ever shown more concern with my accessibility needs than Pillsbury. Whether something was hard to reach, too heavy to lift, or been a barrier of any kind, I've always received the help I needed. My requests have been heard with compassion by Pillsbury's staff and have been attended to very promptly," she says. Changes to door thresholds and privacy doors to the restrooms that seemed minor to some were essential to accessibility.

*It really opened our eyes...We were surprised that such minor details could be such serious barriers. We're constantly learning as new situations happen. Everyone is very understanding and cooperative,*

Said Stromeyer.

### *Supporting a Diverse Culture*

Stromeyer points out how well hiring employees with disabilities has fit into Pillsbury's business:

*From the beginning, we had no resistance within the firm, from the top on down.*

Hiring people with disabilities reinforces the diverse, family-oriented atmosphere of the organization, and both employee morale and productivity is up. Employees hired through EARN have remained on the job or been promoted, promising reduction in recruitment costs. The costs of accommodation have been reasonable and have benefited employees with and without disabilities. An idea that already fit well into Pillsbury's culture became even more established.

### *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).

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