

## County workforce agency gets boost

Keri Brenner, IJ reporter

**Sunday, February 20, 2005** - A little-known county agency is staking out a much higher profile with a new economic summit next month and a \$30,000 contract addition for its boss.

Nanda Schorske of Novato, executive director of the Workforce Investment Board of Marin County, will receive an additional \$30,000 contract amendment, approved Feb. 1 by the Board of Supervisors and awarded to Schorske's one-woman company, E-Vision Partners.

The contract, paid for by the federal government but distributed through the state to the county, is to help Marin employers deal effectively with layoffs and to make county jobs programs available to laid-off workers.

"Reductions have been going on for some time in Marin," Schorske said. "So I think this is a service that is needed by a lot of employers."

Schorske already is under a \$50,000 annual state contract to provide 20 hours a week as executive director for the board during 2004-05. The contract amendment, which runs through July 1, will account for an additional 12 to 15 hours per week, Schorske said.

"Most of the work is relationship development," she said. "We want to make sure the employers understand what the services are that we provide."

The services include job skills, computer searches and resume writing classes offered by the Marin Employment Connection, a county department affiliated with the state Employment Development Department.

The Workforce Investment Board and Marin Employment Connection offices are in relatively new county-leased offices at 120 N. Redwood Drive, just off the Smith Ranch Road exit of Highway 101 and next to the California Automobile Association of America.

"I want to prepare a package of information that employers can just hand to people who are laid off," Schorske said. "I want a package coming from the employer that says, 'Here, I care about what happens to you.'"

In her role as executive director, Schorske also is organizing the first Marin Jobs Summit, scheduled for March 31 at Embassy Suites in San Rafael.

The summit, designed for Marin business and civic leaders, will feature a range of speakers on local economic issues.

Joan Capurro, chairwoman of the 27-member volunteer Workforce Investment Board, said Schorske has ramped up activity at the agency since she came on board a year ago.

"The biggest bureaucratic problem in the past has been that people didn't collaborate - but now that's happening," said Capurro, a Bank of Marin vice president for community relations. "There's more happening in the last year than in the prior four years put together."

The work is important because the county is losing jobs, Capurro said.

In addition to the loss of 1,500 jobs to San Francisco when Marin filmmaker George Lucas relocates some of his empire to the Presidio starting in July, the county could lose jobs from other companies laying off workers or moving to less expensive areas such as Sonoma, Solano or Contra Costa counties, Capurro said.

She said Schorske was "fabulous" as executive director, and she was pleased to see Schorske receive the additional contract.

"What I have found is that businesses do not have a professional ally when it comes to laying people off," Capurro said. "Nanda is a natural. She is so astute in this area, she helps the companies by walking through with them everything they can do."

Money for the Workforce Investment Board office comes from U.S. Department of Labor allocations authorized through the federal Workforce Investment Act, according to Mary Donovan, the county's employment and training program manager.

The federal money is distributed to states, which funnel it to the counties. Marin averages \$1.2 million annually, Donovan said.

The Workforce Investment Act requires companies that plan to lay off more than 50 employees to notify the county.

The county is expected to react with a "rapid response" service, which includes visits to the company to discuss layoff protocols.

Schorske's \$30,000 contract is to pay for such "rapid response" services. Schorske's company, E-Vision Partners, was the only one to respond to a request for bid proposals for the job, advertised locally in the Independent Journal, Donovan said.

"It just so happens she was the only respondent," Donovan said. "It's not a conflict of interest because when we get a need for rapid response, it's quite an expansion from the role of Workforce Investment Board director contract; it's not part of her (executive director) contract."

Next month's conference is a step out for the county's Workforce Investment Board. Previously, the board, which meets every other month, concentrated on behind-the-scenes activities, such as arranging for on-the-job re-training programs.

Speakers include Bill Watkins, executive director of the Economic Forecast Project at the University of California at Santa Barbara; county supervisors Cynthia Murray and Charles McGlashan; and Will Rigney of SBC California, summit co-chairman and a workforce investment board member. Panelists include numerous local business and education leaders.

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