

Opening Its Doors

LHP Embraces Young, Talented Workers

By Symone Salisbury

Ryan Hou's company has benefited from his confidence in young, yet gifted workers.



George Bernard Shaw is credited with uttering the phrase “youth is wasted on the young.” A Columbus company, however, is among those defying that axiom. Many young individuals are taking advantage of career and recreational opportunities that benefit the city. LHP Software, LLC values the skills and potential young professionals bring to the workforce, even before they have gained enough experience to build a lengthy resume.

Established in 2001, LHP specializes in embedded systems, a combination of software and hardware operating in what is defined as “real-time.” An example includes measuring data to test engine temperature.

The majority of LHP’s business centers on the automotive industry with clients such as Cummins, Delphi and Arvin Meritor. LHP also serves the health care field.

“We recruit young, talented engineers (recently) out of either university or master’s degree (programs),” comments Ryan Hou, president of LHP. “Our people hardly have long experience – we joke that we’re an LHP training school. On the other hand, I’m glad to help them. They come to me for two (to) three years, but then the economy picks up, so (the salaries are higher elsewhere).

“It’s hard, but we need to do that. I do have people working for me for five years. I’m training a lot of engineers.”

Cummins connection

LHP purchased its first office in downtown Columbus from Cummins. It unveiled a second Columbus location early this year in the InfoTech Park. Other offices exist in Kentucky, Indianapolis and China.

Hou credits Cummins with giving the company its start.

“We’re in business purely because of Cummins Engine Company,” he asserts. “We are their local preferred vendor.”

“In 2001, Cummins was outsourcing a lot of IT server, database type of work to India,” Hou recalls, “and they were considering outsourcing embedded control software to India. Then LHP said, ‘We are an Indiana-based company. We are a low-cost, qualified supplier and you don’t have to send this offshore.’”

“We helped Cummins and Cummins is helping us,” he states. “It’s a partnership. It’s not just consulting.”

Diverse team

Although Hou advocates workforce diversity, he says that the composition of LHP’s staff isn’t deliberate.

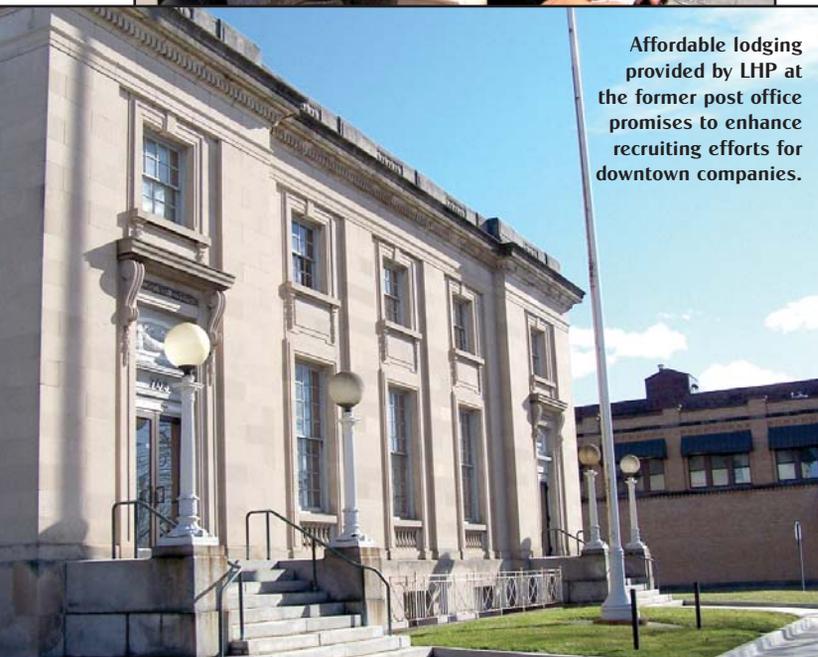
The bottom line: foreign applicants are simply the most qualified.

“That’s why we have to make Columbus a better community for young people to live and work,” he argues, “and we also need to make it a community that’s a welcome community because we’re recruiting foreign nationals.

“There’s no doubt in my mind,” he adds, “that 70% to 80% (of LHP’s qualified candidates) are foreign nationals.”

He also remarks that higher salary demands of more experienced workers can give younger workers an advantage.

Affordable lodging provided by LHP at the former post office promises to enhance recruiting efforts for downtown companies.



“If you have 10 years, 15 years of experience, I can’t afford to hire you,” he maintains.

Chinese investments

Hou moved to Columbus from Taiwan 22 years ago. In 2005 and 2006, he traveled to China to enhance international collaboration.

“We have an office in China that is very important for our survival,” he notes. “We have 20 people in China and the reason for that is Cummins goes to Wuhan, China and sets up test centers there. Cummins is our largest customer here. You go wherever your customer goes.”

Accompanying Hou on his trips was Brooke Tuttle, recently named president of LHP Technologies (a new LHP outlet focused on cross-Pacific trade and company support). Tuttle, longtime president of the Columbus Economic Development Board, was instrumental in attracting several Japanese companies to the city in the 1990s.

Hou lists several benefits of Chinese companies conducting business in the United States, including logistics, marketing, distribution channels, warehousing and quality.

On the other hand, domestic businesses can benefit by investing in Chinese companies.

“I saw a lot of small to medium-sized U.S. companies (in China),” he shares. “They want to go to China to find a low-cost source (to) provide their customers so they could grow their business or find a joint venture in China. They could provide the product over here cheaper. Also, they want to sell their stuff in China.”

Hou plans to return to China this year to further cultivate relationships with potential partners.

Housing talent

Dedicated to attracting young professionals to downtown Columbus, LHP recently purchased a building to serve as lodging for those workers.

Formerly a post office, the site will officially begin accommodating residents later this year. Some residents will be LHP employees. Others will be Cummins trainees from China or summer interns. Their fields of interest won’t be limited to engineering.

“The idea is to keep them downtown,” Hou emphasizes.

“I want to keep them here forever,” he observes. “If you look at our population, we have a lot of foreign nationals. They’re very young. They’re single. I wanted to provide a dormitory type of environment – they don’t want to rent an apartment just by themselves. We provide it at a very low cost compared to renting an apartment.”

Additional downtown attention will potentially result in more business at restaurants and other venues, thus boosting the economy.

Planning ahead

Originally, LHP employed five people; that number has increased to 131. Hou hopes to continue building that figure over the next five years.

“My goal is about 500 people,” he reflects. “I would like to see more small to medium-sized companies here (in Columbus). I would like to see a more diverse workforce.”

Approximately 30% of LHP’s business involves customized IT database support to large companies. One of the most important aspects of LHP’s success, he contends, is its ability to adapt to change.

“I think the reason we keep growing is everyone working together, and also our business model works,” he declares. “Two thirds of our business is very high-tech, embedded software-oriented business. Over the last five years, we really appreciate the help we got from the community and all the talented people we have. It made us a success.”

INFORMATION LINK

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Cummins’ presence at LHP’s original facility is reflected in its work quarters, as well as remnants of training demonstrations involving an engine.