

You're staring at the computer monitor at your workaday job, underwhelmed by your routine. As your mind wanders from its rut, you fantasize about being [your dream job here] for a day.

But it takes guts to walk away from a steady paycheck and the security of knowing where to be at 9 a.m.

Not anymore, thanks to Vocation Vacations, the brainchild of gay Portland entrepreneur Brian Kurth.

"I don't like to say that we're changing people's lives because it's overly dramatic, but we're giving them a tool to change their own lives, risk-free," said Kurth, who began the business in January 2004.

Vocation Vacations is the opportunity to test-drive your dream job, for just a couple of days, without sacrificing your current gig.

The idea struck like lightning while Kurth was sitting in traffic, imagining a different life for himself. When both he and his ex-boyfriend were laid off from their hoity Fortune 500 jobs in Chicago on the same day, change was imminent. They sold the condo and moved to Portland, and Kurth began growing his business.

A few vocations available for sampling include animal therapist, auctioneer, dog day care owner, cowboy boot maker, play director, stylist, wedding planner, river rafting tour guide, vintner, wine retailer, innkeeper, brew master, horse trainer, cheese maker, race car driver, hunting and fishing guide, professional gardener, professional golfer, pastry chef, chocolatier, television producer and even news reporter.

Though many Vocation Vacations are Portland-based, the business is growing rapidly and is adding more options nationwide and even internationally. Vocation Vacations are

RISK-FREE VOCATIONING

Test-drive your dream job

by Jaymee R. Cuti

offered in 23 states and the United Kingdom.

Linda Nardin of Connecticut was the perfect candidate for a Vocation Vacation. The former IBM executive was laid off after working 23 years as the company's public relations and internal communication specialist. She spent a re-education stipend on three Vocation Vacations in Portland last month.

"It was really a great tool to move away from the large, institutional, corporate life that I had led for so many years. I wanted to focus on being a serious student of small business," she said.

While Nardin may not actually take up one of the professions she test-drove—a wine maker, a baker and a florist—she says she will benefit from the exposure to a different life.

"I've come back now realizing life isn't only big business. Small businesses are alive and flourishing," Nardin said.

Nardin and her husband, empty nesters, are planning a move to Florida, where Nardin says



Brian Kurth (left) whips up a batch of yum with baker Tim Healea.

she will abandon corporate life forever.

"I would love to work for myself, and I definitely want to work for a small business. The pace that they work at and the ambiance is very refreshing," she said.

Nardin reported for duty before sunrise at the Pearl Bakery in Northwest Portland to try her skills as a baker.

"You can't really teach someone to bake in two days, but you can give them an impression of what life is like as a baker," said Tim Healea, principal baker and Vocation Vacation mentor. "In two days, you'll find out whether you love it or hate it, because there are things you learn

about the business that are challenging, like the hours. The hours are brutal."

Nardin's introduction to Pearl Bakery included bread shaping, croissant making and a business analysis.

Vocation Vacation packages range from approximately \$600 to \$5,000. According to Nardin, the experience is well worth the expense.

"How many people would have been willing to say, 'Come in, sit down, and I'll tell you everything about my business?' The mentors love what they do and are able to share that passion with people who express an interest in it," she said.

Kurth concurs that the mentors are priceless.

"This provides the one-on-one mentorship that you can't always get by taking a class," he said. A Vocation Vacation also

includes career counseling.

Besides the expanding business, Vocation Vacations will soon be a travel show. Discovery Communications has produced a pilot, which will air this summer. 

For more information about VOCATION VACATIONS visit www.vocationvacations.com.



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