

Photo Solutions Provides Local Jobs

By Scott Laird

Two years ago Brad and Rose Curtis had a decision to make. They needed to expand their home-based business, Photo Solutions and were in need of a new location. They found a great location in North Plains but instead decided to stay and build in Vernonia. "We took several things into consideration when making our decision," said Rose, the corporation's Treasurer. "Ultimately we want to make Vernonia a better place to live – and providing local employment weighed heavily in our decision."

Photo Solutions, started in 1989 in the Curtis' garage, now occupies a 4,000 square foot building on California Avenue near the Blue Heron apartments in Vernonia. It is a high tech company that employs 10 local residents, offering competitive wages, convenient location, and a great work atmosphere. "I am so thankful to work in Vernonia," said employee Wendy West. "I can have a normal family life this way."

Photo Solutions offers additional benefits like a four-day work week, flexible schedules, and a family atmosphere. "We work four, 10-hour days Monday through Thursday because we know people like a three-day weekend," said Brad. "I never would have been able to coach JV basketball," said David Weller who started working at Photo Solutions three years ago right out of high school. "I am able to leave early to coach or I can help out in the family logging business if things are slow here. It is so convenient."

Photo Solutions produces encoder discs for various customers in the motion control industry. Their products are used in robotics, motion control cameras, ophthalmology equipment, and ink jet and laser printers. It is very precise work with tolerances as small as 1/1000th of an inch. "Anytime you need to automate a process or control a motor with a computer, that's what we provide," said Brad.

"We don't compete for the big jobs. Our jobs are thousands of pieces, not millions. We are competing against companies in Southeast Asia, so we have to offer quick turnarounds to stay competitive, as opposed to the lowest price," said Brad.

"What we offer is innovation and creativity. We custom make a lot of our equipment from obsolete pieces we buy from eBay for pennies on the dollar," he added during a recent tour of their facility. "Almost all our vendors are here in Oregon. It allows us to keep face-to-face contact and work closely to find creative solutions. That's where our name 'Photo Solutions' comes from. We say, 'That's a crazy idea...we'll try to figure out a way to do it!'"

Brad graduated from Beaverton High School and worked as a freelance



photographer for four years in places as remote as Nepal and India before moving to Santa Barbara where he became involved in the motion control industry. In 1989 he and Rose moved to Vernonia and started Photo Solutions.

"This is not exactly a high tech hub," said Brad when asked about the difficulties of operating a business from a small community. "We often have to drive for supplies that we can't get here, although we always try to buy local when possible. But with FedEx service available there is no reason not to be here. There are so many positives, why not do it here?"

"We look for good people first," said Brad about his hiring philosophy. "We have awesome people working for us. Everyone has to go through training anyway, so they don't need high tech experience. All our employees are local residents, and we took this into consideration when we decided to stay and build here in Vernonia. We liked our employees and didn't want to lose any of them."

"This is such a family atmosphere here. It's such a better way of life," said employee Penny Hill about working at Photo Solutions. "I did the commute thing before. You just don't realize the stress everyday. You don't have to deal with traffic, weather, or the expense. The air is cleaner. I feel like a weight has been taken off. I can even go home for lunch."

Shop supervisor Kelly Busch, a 4th generation Vernonian, enjoys the convenience. "I just had a baby and get help with day care from my family. It is great to be so close. You get off work and you're home."

Beyond their product offerings, Photo Solutions has developed a great working environment that's flexible and innovative to become a quality employer with desirable job opportunities. That they are local is a terrific bonus!



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