

PHOTOS BY SEAN O'CONNOR/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Bill Tolbert is the first person many New Seasons Market job seekers meet. An employee recruiter, he works hard to keep the company's culture in sync with its surrounding neighborhoods. "We don't have bow ties and shiny shoes," he said. "It's about people being themselves."

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employees and promotes the hiring of people who live in the neighborhoods around his stores. For example, many of the jobs at the Arbor Lodge store at North Portland Boulevard and Interstate Avenue were filled from a hiring fair at the neighboring Peace Lutheran Church. At the New Seasons Concordia store, many workers live near the Northeast 33rd and Killingsworth location.

New Season's reputation for being a good employer has resulted in the company now receiving about 600 applications each week. Like most jobs, who you know and word of mouth account for many of the positions filled, but beyond that, the process of hiring 40 to 60 people each month falls on a skilled recruiter.

That's where New Seasons' Bill Tolbert comes in.

Rohter met Tolbert when he began working at New Seasons in 2000, soon after the first store opened in Raleigh Hills. By March of 2004 the pile of applications was waist high, and Rohter knew he needed someone who was focused on the community

and could make the critical decisions about which applicants hiring managers should consider.

"Bill gives the thumbs up," Rohter said.

Tolbert, a former flight attendant for United Airlines, interacted with

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— Bill Tolbert, New Seasons Market employee recruiter

thousands of people during his 18 years in flight, and honed a skill that helps him pick the right person for the right job. But being a recruiter for New Seasons means he must stay true to its philosophy — maintaining an overall diversity and reflecting Portland culture.

In other words, Tolbert's choices keep each market an inclusive place, where the faces behind the counter reflect faces around the neighborhood.

It used to be if you wanted a job at

a grocery store, that's where the search began. But Tolbert's job is to be proactive by using community resources like the Portland Urban League, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, New Avenues for Youth and even an internship program at De La Salle High School in north Portland.

He searches for future cashiers, bakers and produce specialists by attending evening meetings and networking with community leaders over lunch.

After finding them his next step is not an interview — Tolbert shuns questions like "what is your greatest strength".

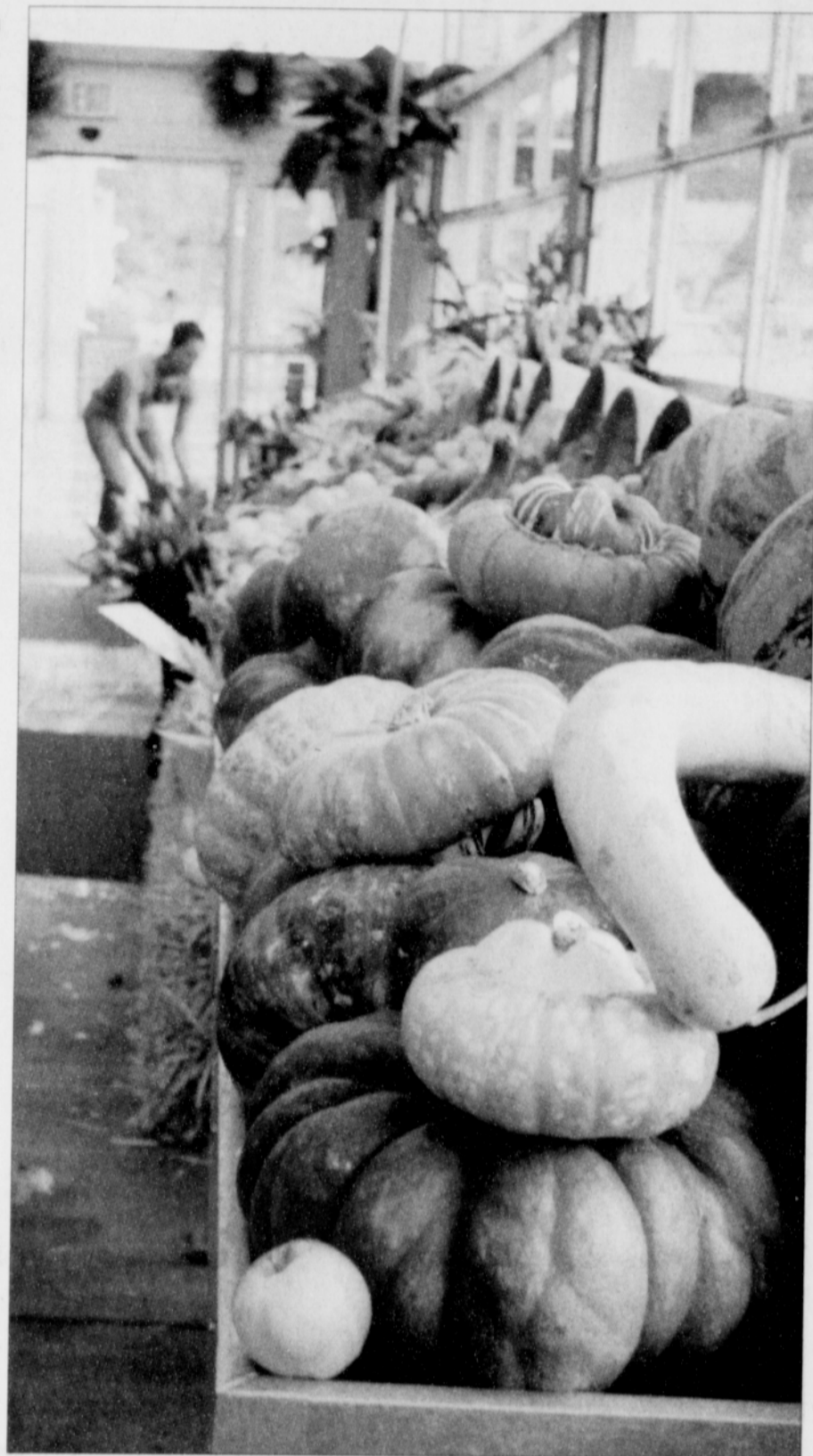
He opts instead for a conversation with the job seeker. Sometimes these talks might appear to be irrelevant, but Tolbert's background in cultural anthropology trained him to read into the topics people choose.

In the past he's chatted with applicants about medieval history, snowboarding and the possibility of life on other planets. The alien talk was not to determine whether we are alone in the universe; it showed him this applicant is an open person.

Tolbert's experience has helped him avoid common pitfalls that screen out qualified applicants because of perceived social weak points.

"I think people get caught up in cultural norms, like a firm handshake," he said. "Too many people get passed over, but it's about recognizing this person may not have looked me in the eye, but that could be a part of their cultural background."

Tolbert does not have a breakdown of the company's diversity. While it is true New Seasons workers represent



New Seasons markets are known for foods with the highest quality ingredients.

nearly every continent he tends to shy away from diversity goals that might encourage a job recruiters to stop once they are met. He isn't into numbers anyway. He just understands the

advantage of broad recruitment.

"We're stronger when we have more diversity," he said. "I like myself, but I wouldn't want to work with a bunch of me's all day long."

PROJECT NO: 78,104

A NEW PLACE TO PLAY.

It's been more than 30 years since Oregonians have gotten a new full-service state park, but that's about to change. In the summer of 2007, 1,755 acres of hilly forestland between HWY 26 and Vernonia will become "Stub" Stewart Memorial State Park. The purchase of this new parkland was made possible with Oregon Lottery profits. They also helped to build the park, which will offer 80 campsites; trails for hiking; horseback riding and mountain biking; a cabin village; a horse camp; a hike-in camp for backpackers; a sheltered picnic ground and a hill top observation tower for sightseeing and stargazing.

State parks are some of Oregonian's favorite places, which is why they voted to use money generated by Lottery games to take care of the ones we have and add new ones. And Buying new parkland is just one of the ways Oregon wins when Oregonians play. Lottery profits also go to economic development, education and watershed enhancement across the state.

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