

Bristol Herald Courier newspaper article Company's Marion site coming online

Monday, June 11, 2007

MARION – Pamela Ames wore a puzzled look while sitting at a computer.

The onscreen information was foreign to her. But eventually, she'll have to learn the program for her new job at U.S. Solutions Group Inc.

"I'm learning their account management – how to get into the account and answering customer questions," she said, still staring at the screen.

It's been six months since U.S. Solutions officials pledged to open a new 11,000-square-foot facility here and hire 70 people to staff the building. In February, the Bristol Virginia-based customer-service outsourcing company opened its Marion site, and has been using it to train new employees like Ames.

"In November, we trained our first class of 12 for Marion," said Andy Noyes, U.S. Solutions' vice president of operations. "They drove all the way down to Bristol."

Since then, 33 people have gone through the company's five-week course, and another 23 are learning the ropes.

Shereese Jackson of Marion is one of the newbies.

"I heard that the working environment was good here, so I wanted to experience it," she said.

Jackson, who started training May 21, said she's anxious to finish.

"I'm waiting to go on the call floor, but we're still learning," she said. "But I really want to go on the call floor."

During the five weeks, trainees work 40 hours a week, learning the computerized customer-service programs designed by companies contracted with U.S. Solutions. Some of the work includes how to find account information, learning the status codes, domestic billing and how to deal with angry customers.

"It's a lot of information," said trainee Cathy Cleary of Glade Spring. "But you have a lot of help here."

Cleary was referring to U.S. Solutions trainer Crystal Jackson, who leads each training class through the material. Jackson has taught about 15 classes now, and said every employee learns the information differently.

"Some people can learn by me telling them, others I have to show them," Jackson said. "Others need to be hands-on, so we do a little bit of everything."

U.S. Solutions' opening in Marion came after company officials said revenue from its other two offices has increased steadily since 2001. The company bought the Main Street building and gutted the interior before opening, Noyes said.

The building previously housed the Dewberry & Davis engineering firm.

With a purple-and-white painted interior, U.S. Solutions' Marion building has one room full of desks and phones for employees. Another room is empty but will be filled with employees if the need arises, Noyes said.

"Eventually, it'll be like what you see in Bristol with pictures and photography and everything," Noyes said.

When trainees like Ames and Cleary have completed their training, they will work full time on the call center floor, answering customer-service calls for U.S. Solutions customers.

Ames said that day is fast approaching.

"It's all new to me now," she said. "But once you get it, it's not so bad."

kbrooks@bristolnews.com | (276) 645-2549