

In down economy, New Horizons retrains workforce for computer positions

by Stephanie Kollmar

A shrinking economy has enabled New Horizons Computer Learning Center in Omaha to grow at a steady rate and add a new facility in Lincoln.

"The economy has benefited us because we're helping individuals retrain themselves to reenter the workforce," said Greg Chambers, general manager. "Other computer training businesses have closed and we're teaching their clients and honoring their vouchers."

New Horizons Computer Learning Center — open in Omaha for five years before it closed in 2000 — reopened in 2001 to serve a growing demand for professional computer training in the areas of Microsoft Office, PhotoShop, Java, Linux+, Server and Cisco, Chambers said.

"When Avaya closed, we had to get those employees off the factory floor and train them with skills to enter the office world," he said. "We service Offutt Air Force Base and are breaking into one-day seminar style business training on time and project management."

While New Horizons Computer Learning Center was fortunate to get a large company as a client, Chambers said, he's just as happy with smaller companies.

"The mid-market is our bread and butter," he said. "It's allowed us to have growth that is an inch deep and a mile wide rather than having ourselves immersed so deeply into one client."

Since March 2001 the company has



Chambers in a PowerPoint 2000 class ... "The economy has benefited us because we're helping individuals retrain themselves to reenter the workforce."

grown to fill a 10,000-square-foot facility with eight classrooms at 120th and Blondo and a temporary two-classroom building in Bellevue. The center provides 1,300 to 1,600 student days of training a month, Chambers said.

A three-classroom facility will open in June in Lincoln.

"We started with me and now have 26

full-time employees and some part-time contractors," Chambers said. "By the end of the year we hope to have 35 to 40 employees between Omaha and Lincoln."

One- to five-day classes are offered on days, nights and weekends, Chambers said.

"We hold a lot of private events for companies," he said. "One-day seminars on

upgrades are popular. They allow employees from a company to play on new programs in a non-work environment.

"It's our duty in the marketplace to deliver training. The closing of other computer companies has been a catalyst because we honor their promises and uphold the integrity of the computer training industry."

A nine-person sales team is the driving force behind the increased number of students, Chambers said.

"Our sales team is very aggressive and goes out there to drum up business," he said. "They work with companies to determine where they are and where they want to be."

"Our salespeople can help get companies up to speed and quantify the value of the training to employers."

Web-based and self-paced courses are being incorporated to accommodate the new technology involved in training, Chambers said.

"It's going to allow us to help customers in other places," he said. "We could branch out to remote locations in Nebraska."

The concept for New Horizons Computer Learning Center was developed in 1982 when Mike Brinda started a classroom in Santa Ana, Calif. Brinda grew his idea to eight locations in southern California and sold his companies to New Horizons International.

New Horizons began franchising the concept and there were 13 centers by 1992.

"We now have 280 locations in 40

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New Horizons

Continued from preceding page.

countries," Chambers said.

Centers opened in Omaha and Lincoln in 1995 but closed in 2000 until another owner came along.

"Our ownership is based out of Memphis," Chambers said. "There are centers in Nashville, Indianapolis, Pittsburgh and Columbus, Ohio."

"When Omaha was up for sale, the owner, David Weinstein, decided he liked the business climate because it was similar to Memphis."

Weinstein was in Omaha to make a decision when he ran into Chambers by accident.

"We hit it off and realized our business

goals matched," Chambers said. "I came on board as sales manager in March 2001."

A native of Denver, Chambers came to Omaha to attend Creighton University. He graduated in 1991 and moved back to Denver.

"My wife's family is from Nebraska, so when we decided to raise our family we came back to Omaha in 1994," Chambers said.

He spent time at InfoUSA before breaking off and starting his own company.

"It didn't work out, so I was lucky when I ran into David Weinstein," Chambers said. "He had a successful networking business and then ran into this business and made it one of the top 10 New Horizons in the country."