

Keeping workers employed

Shared Work Program strengthens Theis Steel

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By **SCOTT WHIPPLE**
STAFF WRITER

BRISTOL — Theis Precision Steel uses the state's Shared Work Program to help save jobs and keep its employees gainfully employed.

The largest high-carbon and stainless specialty strip mill in North America, Theis ("Tice") does cold rolling and hardening and tempering of high carbon and alloy strip steels, as well as cold rolling of all stainless and nickel alloys.

Theis Human Resources Manager Tina Pac said the company is grateful for the Shared Work Program.

As a result of recent changes, eligibility criteria for employers qualified to participate in the unemployment insurance program has expanded. It now offers companies like Theis more opportunities to take part and avoid laying off skilled workers.

"The program helps subsidize those work days our employees miss," said Pac. The program, administered by the Connecticut Department of Labor, can provide partial unemployment benefits to employees when a company is experiencing a temporary economic downturn and wants to avoid layoffs. The goal is to retain skilled workers so companies can quickly return to full strength when business picks up.

As of July 1, employers now qualify for the program when faced with the need to reduce the hours of its permanent full-time and/or part-time workforce by 10 to 60 percent. Prior to the change, companies could only qualify if work hours were reduced between 20 and 40 percent, and eligible employees were required to be full-time workers.

Pac says Theis has approximately 100 employees on the program. Salaried positions are in production, accounting, sales and shipping; hourly workers: machinists, bull grinders and machine operators.

According to state Labor Commissioner Sharon Palmer, the program now allows a company to apply if it has at least two employees affected by the change in hours worked.

Before the July 1 change, the minimum requirement for eligibility was four

employees. In addition, the Labor Department will also be able to provide a dependency allowance to those employees taking part in the program that have qualifying dependents on their unemployment insurance claim.

“For the past 22 years, our state’s Shared Work program — one of the best in the country — has helped to avoid layoffs, preserve jobs and retain skilled workers during financially trying times,” Palmer said. “These recent changes, which allow us to make an excellent program even stronger, will benefit our workforce, employers, and overall economy.”

First enacted in 1992, the Shared Work program originally was available to “contributing employer” companies. As of last October, the program is now available to all Connecticut employers meeting the program’s eligibility requirements.

Palmer says the program has allowed employers to avoid the costly expense of retraining new employees which would result if layoffs took place, while valued and skilled employees keep their job security and benefits while receiving partial unemployment benefits to help supplement lost wages.

Companies cannot eliminate or reduce employee fringe benefits and affected employees must meet all regular unemployment compensation requirements. Currently, 104 companies are participating in the Shared Work program.

Pac hopes the state will continue the program.

“It’s important to us here at Theis to retain our skilled workers,” she said.

Employers interested in participating in the program or obtaining more information can email **DOL.sharedwork@ct.gov** or call (860) 263-6660.

Scott Whipple can be reached at (860) 225-4601, ext. 319 or swhipple@centralctcommunications.com.
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