

## Pre-employment screenings becoming very common

By CHRISTINE CHARNOSKY Staff Writer

Potential employees may not enjoy undergoing drug tests and other screenings, but they serve an important purpose for would-be employers. Hal Kodikian, owner of Rental World in Hatfield Township, said that at least 50 percent of the applicants he considers hiring are rejected due to problems found in background checks. For the past four to five years, he has been using the services of TGB Associates in Montgomery Township to check credit, employment and criminal backgrounds of potential new hires. Prior to conducting these checks, "I had workers who broke into the place or equipment would disappear," he said, and the employees were not as reliable.

Thomas G. Bacheler, principal of TGB for 25 years, said that since Sept. 11, 2001, the number of employers conducting pre-employment screenings has nearly tripled, he said. State law requires employers hiring people to work in health care or with children and the elderly to run background checks on potential employees, according to Bacheler.

"HR (human resources) people need all the tools they can get to make good hiring decisions," he said. More than 50 percent of applications and resumes will contain some discrepancies, said Bacheler, with the most falsehoods found regarding educational backgrounds. Also, 80 percent of those who have a criminal record will try to hide it, he said.

If a person marks "no" on an application regarding having a criminal background and does have a criminal background, that person is automatically disqualified from being hired for lying.

Pamela Abraham-Hernandez, director of human resources at the Central Montgomery Medical Center in Hatfield Township, said, "If it's not job related -like a DUI from 10 years ago and they aren't driving for us - as long as they honestly disclosed it" then the person could be hired. Sometimes people aren't aware that if they paid a fine, that's considered a conviction and it will appear on their record, she said. In one case, an applicant had an outstanding bench warrant and once they got it cleared up, the person ultimately was hired, said Abraham Hernandez.

Leon Singletary, principal of HR First Contact in Fort Washington, said the main criterion that employers need to use when interpreting the information collected from criminal background checks is whether or not an offense is job related, how much time has elapsed since the offense was committed and the severity of the offense. He encourages people to conduct their own background checks so they can see if anything shows that shouldn't be there or that they've forgotten about or thought had been cleared up.

Singletary and Bacheler both said a Social Security trace is the first search they conduct. It shows whether the number belongs to a deceased person and whether the applicant has used other names, Singletary said. The trace also confirms that the Social Security number belongs to the applicant and the search matches the name to addresses, said Bacheler.

HR First Contact requires applicants to take a 58-question job applicant survey, which includes questions that "employers would love to ask but can't - unless it's done consistently." Questions might include things like, "How much money do you spend per week on recreational drug use?" "It's amazing the kinds of answers we get," said Singletary. A person might say to themselves, "If I say none, they'll think I'm lying."

A pre-employment drug test is often conducted by companies, even if backgrounds checks are not done. "If someone is using drugs, they may also be selling." Bacheler said, the person may start a new job as a "whole new arena" to sell in.