

Directional: Working under all weather conditions

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him a job, and he is as comfortable in the kitchen rolling dough as he is on the corner with the sign working his magic.

That magic has translated into more customers going into the strip mall anchored by Raley's supermarket. According to Round Table Pizza manager Duane Blood, it has given the restaurant more visibility and increased the lunch crowd.

"By him being out on the corner, a lot more people know that we are in this mall," Blood said. "We are kind of hidden in here, and he has really made it fun and attracted more people."

While restaurants have the luxury of assigning one of their employees to be a human directional, companies such as Eventz Extraordinaire hire human directionals

for developers and other retailers. Earning \$10 an hour, human directionals are positioned in strategic locations with high visibility.

"The people that we hire as human directionals run the gamut from high school students to folks who want to earn a little extra cash on the weekends," said Mike McCullough, vice president of sales and marketing for Eventz Extraordinaire. "The schedule is pretty much open for them to work whenever they want."

Because developers and retailers want to grab customers attention during peak hours, many of the human directionals are most visible on the weekends, said McCullough, a time when the attention of potential shoppers may be less focused on work and weekly routines.

With only two days to get the most visibility, human directionals work under all

weather conditions to maximize their hours, and supervisors perform routine checks to keep an eye on them during extreme conditions.

"If its raining, we give them raincoats and umbrellas, or water if it's really hot," McCullough said.

To pass the time, Joseph Garcia, 32, and Edison Gomez, 18, listen to their MP3 players and to the Oakland Raiders games on Sundays as they hold signs at Travis Boulevard and Second Street. Their five-hour shift for Eventz Extraordinaire is a way for them to make easy money on a job where the scenery changes with every assignment.

"I've been doing this for a year and it's pretty easy," Garcia said. "Christmas is right around the corner, and I like to have extra money for that. The first couple of times you do it is hard on your legs,

but you get used to it."

During the summer, Garcia and Gomez came armed with their own sunscreen protection, hats and long-sleeve shirts. They had a constant supply of Gatorade from the supervisor.

On one particular Sunday, Garcia and Gomez were holding signs directing people to the new development by Olson Homes on East Travis Boulevard.

"Some cities (such as Fairfield) have an ordinance against street signs" said Shaun Mullarky, director of marketing for Olson Homes. "So to help direct people looking for homes to our community, human directionals allow us to work within the city code and help home shoppers."

Reach Ines Bebea at 427-6934 or ibebea@dailyrepublic.net.

Stevenson: Dollar drop

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concerned, that did not really hit until June or July, and, funny, isn't it, that our stock market has been hitting record highs after a few hiccups.

Now, investors may be overly optimistic, but if the economy was really as miserable as was claimed, you would think stock traders would have noticed.

Of course, there are real reasons for the drop in the dollar, two of which may be

the soaring price of oil and the incredible number of dollars held by foreign central banks. We are, to some extent, at the mercy of the Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese, who, collectively, hold more than a trillion of our dollars.

On the other hand, if we stopped buying their goods, you can just imagine what would happen to the Asian economies.

Bud Stevenson, a stockbroker, lives in Fairfield. Reach him at Bstevenson254@aol.com.

Benefit: Retirement, health care are important

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potentially cost thousands of dollars."

Billet said this means workers should read the benefit packages provided by their employers and not hesitate to ask questions about them from human resources offices or call centers set up by benefit providers.

So what, aside from price, could be so different year-to-year?

For one thing, companies increasingly are providing incentives and tools to encourage healthy behavior, such as losing weight or quitting smoking, and adding penalties or boosting premiums for those who don't make lifestyle changes, Billet said.

In addition, many companies are setting up disease management programs with free drugs to treat chronic conditions like diabetes or asthma, or underwriting preventive screening tests such as mammograms.

And some are adding "spousal surcharges" if a workers seeks to cover spouses who have access to insurance through their own employers.

"Families have to look at the benefits both (spouses)



www.hewitt.com
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are offered and decide what to do," Billet said. "In some cases, it might make sense to pay the surcharge, while in others you won't want to do that."

Sara Taylor, head of open enrollment at Hewitt Associates, suggests workers focus on what she considers to be the most important offerings—health care insurance and retirement savings plans.

"Workers don't have to pick all the benefits — and many can't afford to — so go for the big bang ones," she said.

Taylor added that not making a choice for medical coverage can have ramifications, too.

"If you don't select a health plan, some employers will say, 'You will stay in what you have today,'" she said. "Others, if you don't act, will decide that they'll move you to another plan of their choosing."

"And some have become

very aggressive, saying 'If you don't enroll, we'll put you into the 'no coverage' category for medical.'"

Randy Stram, vice president of MetLife Employee Benefits, a division of the New York-headquartered insurance company, said a survey of workers found that the majority would like more help in selecting benefits, with six in 10 saying they would like employers to suggest benefits most appropriate for their ages and lifestyles.

"Twenty years ago, employees didn't need to make any decisions because there were no choices," Stram said. "Today, benefits have become more complicated, and employers have shifted more of the decision-making responsibility to their employees. But employees are saying, I'm ill-prepared to make these decisions."

MetLife has developed some "rules of thumb" guides for workers in various life stages, available on their Web site at www.metlife.com. When it comes to health insurance, for example, single workers are told that if they're young and in good health, they should consider high-deductible plans while new families are told that while health

management organizations may be cheapest, a family is likely to want a wider selection of doctors and should consider other plans.

Stram said that according to the latest survey, workers still rate medical insurance as their most important benefit, just ahead of paid vacation.

Other prized benefits, in order of preference, are 401(k) retirement accounts, prescription drug benefits, dental benefits, sick leave, pensions, vision coverage, life insurance, disability insurance, flexible work schedules, long-term care coverage, financial planning services, home owners and renters insurance, income annuities, auto insurance and banking services.

Lead in some lipsticks, group claims

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The Food and Drug Administration said Friday it would look into claims from an advocacy group that certain lipsticks contain potentially dangerous levels of lead.

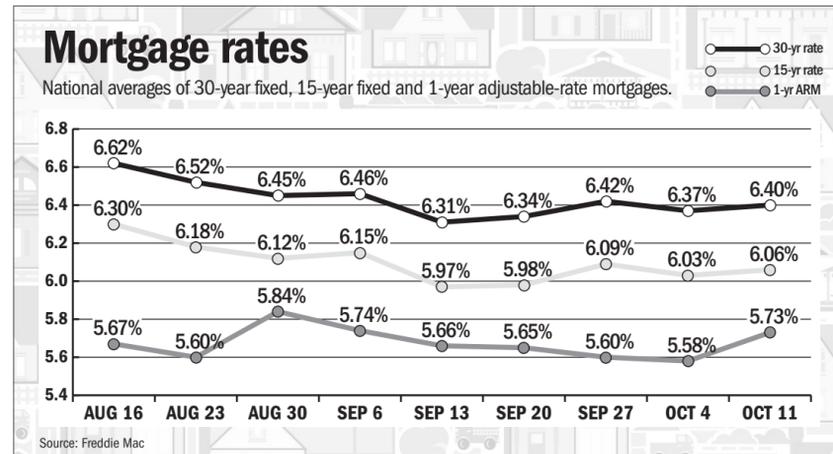
Similar claims in the past have not been confirmed, the

agency said.

The Campaign for Safe Cosmetics said that a third of the 33 red lipsticks examined by an independent lab contained a level of lead exceeding 0.1 parts per million — which is the FDA's limit for lead in candy. The FDA does not set a limit for lead in lipstick.

The FDA said concerns about lead in lipstick have been raised occasionally in the print media and on the Internet.

The trade association representing the cosmetic industry acknowledged "negligible" levels of lead in some lipsticks, but said it is not intentionally added.



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