

Abra, STS Make Big Splash, end Park District's Payroll

Woes

by Robert Gast



Payroll department workers often tread water to keep up with weekly check runs. Accommodating Rockford Park District's labor pool of 250 to 1,350 has made the members of their payroll department buoyant swimmers.

Along with dramatic shifts in the park district's workforce that coincide with striking changes in

Rockford Illinois' weather, RPD's payroll department faces other challenges: Some employees perform up to five different jobs in one day and are paid at as many different rates; bi-weekly pay periods are met by staggering two separate payroll runs, resulting in weekly check issuance; as a government body, detailed reports pertaining to payroll must be submitted to The U.S. Department of Revenue; and because of the vast number of park

facilities that serve the city of 150,000 people, the park's golf pros, lifeguards, gardeners and other employees keep track of their time on paper timesheets, which ultimately are entered by hand.

Although RPD's payroll department has enough work for ten full time employees, only three people make it run. To meet these challenges, they use Abra Payroll software from Best! Software, Inc., and full support services from Best! Business Partner, Solutions Technology and Software (www.stshr.com).

Before deploying Abra Payroll, RPD used an accounting and payroll package that ran under the Unix operating system. According to John Percell, Business and Payroll Manager for RPD, "It was not very user friendly." An IS person had to run all of the payroll department's reports because the system didn't have a list of

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predefined reports to choose from. Special checks were a problem too: Percell adds, “We used to have to do a lot of manual calculations for withholding.”



The Deep End

When their payroll software vendor announced that the package RDP was using would no longer be supported, they started looking for alternatives, and for a short time, considered using an outside payroll service bureau. Not much would have been gained since they still had to review, correct and enter time from upwards of 500 hand-written time sheets per week, and special checks still required a calculator. “Actually, we lost a lot of control,” says Percell. When the service bureau got bogged down with different pay rates and found it difficult to work within the given time constraints, “they just disappeared,” says Percell.

“Abra does a beautiful job of creating a 941 for us. With our other system, these calculations had to be done manually and it used to take a couple of days to get the numbers to work out. Now I tell Abra to just do it, and like the ads for Nike say, Abra just does it. As far as Abra goes it has been a lifesaver.”

John Percell, Business and Payroll Manager, RPD

Once again, Percell had to find a solution. In his quest, he discovered Abra Payroll at a trade show in Chicago. He was familiar with the Abra name since the park district had purchased their HR module in 1990. “When I saw what Abra could do and saw the price of it compared to the price of other packages, I realized that it would do everything we wanted and it was inexpensive compared to the alternatives.”

Abra runs on Windows-based computers and integrates with Microsoft Office Suite. It lets users produce paychecks on demand, which, for Percell, was a positive change. Abra offers two different methods for

handling multiple pay rates: Employees can have an unlimited number of secondary jobs and secondary rates, or their hours at a second rate can be entered at the point of timesheet entry and allocated to different departments, locations, projects, etc. Robert Denkewalter, President of STS comments, “Abra can handle over twenty different pay rates for a single employee. I have seen 28 different base rates for a single employee in a two week period.”

To accommodate exceptional situations, park payroll clerks can void and reissue single checks within Abra, while automatically updating accounts like employee earnings, deductions, tax withholdings, and employer tax liability. Abra lets Percell run an unlimited number of trial payrolls to ensure accuracy, and he can reconcile checks using an Excel spreadsheet. For better overall control, more than one hundred standard reports are available that include information on: Payroll deposit requirements, workers compensation costs, unemployment and disability

wages, as well as registered, point in time, and date range reports.

Best! technicians installed Abra Payroll on RPD's Microsoft Windows 2000 server. Then RPD's IT Department provided them with files containing year-end totals, and some history necessary for going forward. They configured a template, loaded the data, and set up all of RPDs existing payroll rules. "We did carry over year end totals but didn't carry over a lot of year end detail. We do have backups if we need to restore anything."



Sink or Swim

With RPDs finite payroll department resources, the new system had to work without a hitch. "We didn't have time to analyze or play with problems," says Percell. Best! Partner, STS, in Elk Grove, Illinois, provided two days of on-site training to reduce confusion.



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" I didn't feel like I could do things the way I wanted them done with the other system. I always had to get someone from IT to assist me- I couldn't just go in and experiment. Abra is very user friendly and STS has done a wonderful job for us."

While legions of RPD field employees stay on top of a huge water park, three swimming pools, five public golf courses, four museums, two sports complexes and over 200 hundred parks, only two payroll clerks are available to review and key time sheet data in by hand. Abra has simplified the whole payroll process and has given these busy people more time. As an example, Percell comments, "Abra does a beautiful job of creating a 941 for us. With our other system, these calculations had to be done manually and it used to take a couple of days to get the numbers to work out. Now I tell Abra to just do it, and like the ads for Nike say, Abra just does

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