

# BUSINESS

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## Replanting Missouri jobs

Jobs once sent to India are moved to entrepreneur's native state

**K**eri DeWitt grew up on a mid-Missouri farm, left for a basketball scholarship at the University of California-Irvine and, eventually, became a largely self-educated Web consultant.

opportunities for central Missourians, a promise that mobilized community forces to create and equip the center. This week in Marshall, about a dozen trainees are learning how to

This is the spot where such stories usually say, "And she never looked back."

But DeWitt did. She looked back to her roots in the Marshall and Carrollton areas and

### AT WORK



DIANE STAFFORD

do transcription services — jobs that DeWitt previously had outsourced to India. Two other workers already are trained and earning income.

kick-started an amazing job-creation project that led to the opening of the Central Missouri Technology and Skills Training Center in Marshall.

DeWitt promised to provide job

The process that led to the relocation of jobs from overseas to mid-Missouri began with DeWitt seeing an opportunity in the explosion of reality TV shows. Such unscripted shows need daily transcription of what was said during the day's videotaping.

With her computer and Internet expertise, DeWitt figured out a way to reduce the file size and send digital video files (the "dailies") to transcribers who would then type the ad-libbed "script" and send it back to the show's producers in time for the next day's taping.

She created a company, Teresis, from a Greek word that means "to watch over," and entered a partnership with Rapidtext Inc., an existing transcription services company.

### Keri DeWitt

■ CEO of Teresis, which provides digitizing, media management and transcription service for unscripted TV productions.  
■ Attended Carrollton (Mo.) High School in the 1980s through 11th grade.



Illustration created by L. ERIC CRAVEN/The Kansas City Star

Because of the need for high-speed Internet connections to use the Teresis technology, it was easy and cheap for DeWitt to send digital files to transcribers in India. But concerns nagged at her.

She read about rural and small-town unemployment and thought she could make a difference, at least in one small part of the

Midwest.

"Why couldn't I send the jobs back to my hometown?" wondered DeWitt, who is based in Los Angeles.

Furthermore, she'd had problems dealing with the time difference between California and India, with the inability of native

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# STAFFORD: Bringing work back to the Midwest

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ndians to understand and transcribe American colloquialisms, and with what she found to be a disappointing work ethic by some of the outsourced workers who would quit at the end of their shift whether or not they'd finished transcribing the "dailies." There was a bigger problem, though: Marshall had no high-speed Internet service. That changed in January, when DSL lines came to Marshall. And that's when the community mobilization kicked into high gear, The Marshall Saline Development Corp., the Missouri Valley Community Action Agency, Missouri Valley College and the Saline Industries Council combined forces to finance, equip and staff a small job-training center, thanks largely to DeWitt's promises.

My guess is that something like this would have happened, but over a couple of years and not nearly as quickly," said Roy Hunter, executive director of the

**"I wanted to bring work back to people who could really appreciate it."**

*Keri DeWitt*

area's development corporation. "We needed a tech lab to upgrade the skills of our work force, but Keri made it happen sooner.

Within six months we're going to have 30 to 40 people trained to help Keri."

Hunter's wife, Susan Hunter, a careers services specialist at the community action agency, has the first group scheduled for training this week, thanks to the donation of a bank of computers from the college and to the purchase of transcription foot pedals from community donations.

April Austin, one of the first two mid-Missouri residents to work for Teresis, says she loves the flexible hours and the \$15 to \$20 an hour she earns doing the transcription work from her home.

"You have to have typing skills, a self-motivated work ethic and some comfort with computers, but I think it's a viable job for many workers," Austin said. "It's just great insight for Keri to bring work back to the Midwest."

The training center, located behind a radio station in an unassuming one-story building in Marshall, is a testament to what an incredibly modest annual budget of \$28,000 can do when forces come together. Melanie Corporon, the part-time manager of the center, used her considerable art and interior decorating talents to create a bright space in an otherwise drab building.

A conference room at the back of the computer training facility is used by community groups that previously had no comparable space. Activity is expected to step up in the fall when Missouri Valley computer students come back to campus and volunteer time at the training center.

"Eventually, we hope to staff the center 12 to 14 hours a day, five

days a week," Roy Hunter said. "We want to offer basic computer training to anyone in the community—as broad a community as we can without charging anyone. We're aiming for nonregimented classes where people can work at their own pace and learn computer skills that could help them work for Keri or someone else."

DeWitt is matter-of-fact about being the catalyst to bring this job-opportunity project to fruition. "Basically I just created the path," she said. "I wanted to bring work back to people who could really appreciate it."

She's also treated a model for other companies to think creatively and return jobs to domestic soil. "

*Diane Stafford's workplace column appears on Thursdays. To reach her, write the business desk at 172 Grand Blvd., Kansas City, MO 64108; send email to [Stafford@kcstar.com](mailto:Stafford@kcstar.com); or call (816) 234-4359*