

# Talent Pros

## Corporate Recruiters Find Rewards, Challenges Bringing Employees to Duluth

BY PATRICK LAPINSKI

**J**ohn Higgins, vice president of Talent Management at Essentia Health, is as close as you can get to the front line in the world of corporate recruiting. He is seeing record numbers of new hires, but they still need more. "We closed the last fiscal year this past June 30, with more than 3,300 new hires into the system. That was kind of a record number.

"At the moment, it's really more of an employee's market versus a recruiter's market or employer's market," Higgins said. "There are multiple openings for every candidate that's in the market today; they have choices. My job leading a team of talent professionals is to make sure that our opportunities are more appealing than our competitions are, because they have the opportunity to go a lot of different places. We have to make sure that we're doing our best to ensure that we're providing them with a great experience as they're considering us, and that we're making sure they understand what differentiates us from our competition so they pick the right place, right? It's not about trying to get just anybody into these jobs, it's getting the right people into these jobs."



The nursing shortage is still a reality for the medical community. Higgins says Essentia has made great progress toward acquiring the talent they need. They hired a little more than 800 new nurses into the organization last year, the highest number they've achieved. "It was pretty significant, a 17 percent year-over-year improvement in terms of number of nurses that we hired," Higgins said.

Essentia Health operates 14 hospitals, 78 clinics, 24 retail pharmacies and six long-term care facilities

in 45 locations across several states. "On average, probably each recruiter helped hire about 150 new people into the business. So, they're busy," Higgins said. "That means they're hiring about three people a week. You can imagine helping somebody navigate a career change and helping them get through that process. It's a pretty impressive feat to get that kind of number across the line."

Cirrus Aircraft has a tantalizing lead-in to their online career page. "We are a team of aviation enthusiasts

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- JOHN HIGGINS, VICE PRESIDENT OF TALENT MANAGEMENT AT ESSENTIA HEALTH



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- NADIA HAIDAR, PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGER WITH CIRRUS

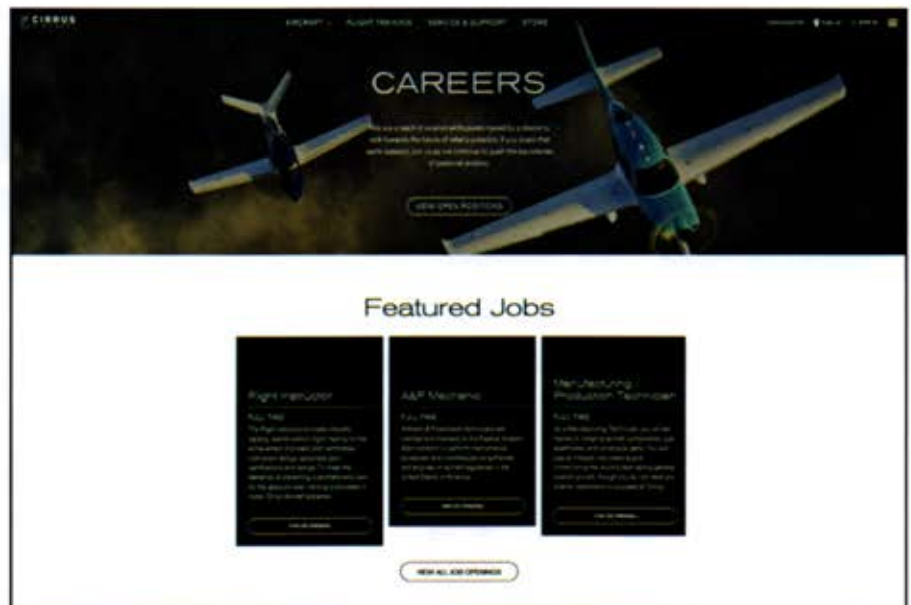
fueled by a desire to look towards the future of what's possible. If you share that same passion, join us as we continue to push the boundaries of personal aviation.”

The Cirrus Design Corporation, doing business as Cirrus Aircraft (formally Cirrus Design), was founded in 1984, in Baraboo, Wisconsin, by

Alan and Dale Klapmeier to produce the VK-30 kit aircraft, and is based in Duluth. The company is owned by a subsidiary of the Chinese government-owned Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC), with operational locations in seven states across the U.S. including Minnesota. Since 1994, its headquarters

and main manufacturing facilities have been in Duluth. The company's corporate headquarters are in Tennessee.

Cirrus markets several versions of its three certified single-engine light aircraft models: the SR20 (certified in 1998), SR22 (certified in 2000) and SR22T (certified in 2010). As of



CIRRUS PHOTOS BY ADMAX



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April 2023, Cirrus has delivered more than 9,000 SR-aircraft in more than 20 years of production, and has been the world's largest producer of piston-powered aircraft since 2013.

Depending on how close to the action you want to be, Cirrus has job positions that range from entry level and skilled labor, manufacturing technicians, machinists, engineers, management, human resources, finance, accounting, supply chain to IT support.

Aviation is an exciting field, and Cirrus in Duluth keeps growing. "We're a leading manufacturer of personal aircraft," said Nadia Haidar, Public Relations Manager with Cirrus.

With revenues of more than \$350 million, 1,200 of the aerospace industry manufacturer's employees work in Duluth. The average yearly salary with Cirrus is \$66,284. Haidar says Cirrus has a lot to offer prospective employees, including job growth.

First off, if you love to fly, there's Flying Club, which is a group of people who want to own a Cirrus aircraft and come together to share access as well as the high costs associated with ownership. Typically, the club membership is a mix of student pilots learning to fly, as well as seasoned pilots who have many hours in various aircraft.

"Cirrus has a clean and quiet manufacturing environment," says Haidar. The aircraft manufacturer offers a 401(k) match up to five percent, and a comprehensive benefit package. Cirrus is bullish on the growth of their employees, investing in the futures of their employees through a tuition reimbursement program, recurrent and area-specific training, talent acceleration and leadership development, and continuing education opportunities.

"We also engage employees by offering several employee and family events throughout the year," adds Haidar, "as well as the opportunity to take part in activity clubs and community events. From holiday and special occasion celebrations to local runs and barbecues, our team can connect with each other, the community, and our customer. Additionally, all employees enjoy a discount at the company store and exclusive discounts from our world-class partners, like Garmin, Bose, AT&T, Microsoft, Fastenal and more."

While the job may sell a candidate, attracting people to move to Duluth can be a challenge. You'd be surprised to know it's not the location that is the roadblock, it's housing. As



JARED CUOCO - CIRRUS HUMAN RESOURCES RECRUITMENT TEAM MEMBER.

with every major employer, Cirrus hears the same feedback.

"An obstacle that has been consistent in the Duluth area is the housing market. Attraction to Lake Superior, the outdoors and all that Duluth has to offer is high; however, without sufficient housing options, we have not always been successful in bringing more workforce to the area," Haidar said. "High rental market makes it difficult to attract entry level professionals to Duluth. Limitation of daycare in the Duluth area has limited a portion of the workforce (stay-at-home parents, single family households)."

The use of online meeting technology is very relevant in the Cirrus recruiting world, enabling them to reach out across the country for candidates. "Having the technology of virtual interviews has allowed us to tap into candidate pools that may not be geographically local to Cirrus. Being able to initially interview someone in another region of the country



DARBY POTSWALD - CIRRUS HUMAN RESOURCES RECRUITMENT TEAM MEMBER.

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without requiring travel has been very beneficial," Haidar said. "The time of our interview process has greatly reduced due to the team's capability. We have hiring managers meet candidates within days of their applications being completed."

Haidar says Cirrus follows a tiered approach to recruiting "Recruiters conduct pre-screens with candidates to do a high-level fit assessment. Hiring managers will complete a skillset interview and a peer and team interview onsite with candidates."

St. Luke's is an ultra-modern, comprehensive health care system, serving residents of northeast Minnesota, northwestern Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Their services include

primary and specialty care, a Level II Regional Trauma Center to provide emergency care, a nationally recognized Regional Heart & Vascular Center, as well as a Regional Cancer Center accredited by the American College of Surgeons' Commission on Cancer.

St. Luke's promotes itself as "the close-to-home health care provider for many," using a combination of expertise, technology and compassion to provide cost-effective, accessible medical care. "We were founded to offer care



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- MOLLIE LUCIA, ST. LUKE'S RN RECRUITER

to all, regardless of race, religion or background. We continue to do that as each doctor, nurse and other St. Luke's staff members strive to live out our Mission every day: "The Patient. Above All Else." St. Luke's follows a set of core values, compassion, quality, teamwork and safety, to help employees live the mission in their daily practice.

"We do amazing things at the hospital that impact patient's lives, we have an opportunity to make a difference in someone's life," says long-time RN recruiter Mollie Lucia. "I believe that there are many different types of positions in health care that people do not think about when looking at positions. There are so many rewarding opportunities in health care to consider, even if a candidate does not like to work hands-on, in patient care."

But why Duluth? Like their all-encompassing values, St. Luke's version of Duluth includes the North Shore of Lake Superior. "Loved for its unique topography, location on the tip of Lake Superior, and miles of trails." Sounds idyllic. St. Luke's sells Duluth as a city that is full of outdoor adventures, regularly appearing as a top destination in outdoor enthusiast magazines. They also tout the finer cultural amenities found in a city the size of Duluth, music, the arts, an aquarium, large universities and a vibrant craft beer scene.

"Duluth is a great place to live and work, many people are familiar with Duluth and all it has to offer. We can always promote all the wonderful outdoor activities, but also attracting candidates on other things such as the arts, theater, educational opportunities," Lucia said.

Not sure what kind of job you want? St. Luke's can help with that. Try the Talent Network. Joining connects you with St. Luke's team of recruiters.

"Talent Network is a great way to connect with our recruiters, share your resume and job preferences without applying for a specific job. If a position opens that suits your skills, they will let you know," Lucia said.

As with any large company, many positions in a variety of areas are available, depending upon demand. St. Luke's broadly categorizes employment as entry-level, in-demand careers, physician openings, advance practice clinician (APC) and student opportunities.

"We look for nursing staff (RNs, LPNs, nursing assistants), many technical positions such as surgery techs, radiology techs, lab, pharmacy, respiratory therapists,

medical assistants. In addition to our medical staff, we look for professional positions throughout the organization, clerical specialists/support, hospitality services," and there is probably more laughs Lucia. "We have a lot to offer."

Since the pandemic, businesses have learned there are many ways to engage with candidates, including the use of online meeting spaces like Teams or Zoom. Their popularity has waned somewhat in the recruiting world. Not surprisingly, people want to meet in person, they want to have that face-to-face contact, a handshake if you will, and a chance to see their potential workplace first hand.

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currently offer sign-on bonuses for many of our positions. We also offer monthly stipends for some of our positions, with the stipend we give a student a monthly payment to help them out while they are attending school. The student will then join us as an employee once they graduate. We want to make sure that all candidates regardless of the position have excellent customer service skills.

St. Luke's has strong training and continuing education programs but most candidates come with a level of expectation regarding their skills. "We are willing to train, but this depends on the position. Many of our positions require a license or certification upon hire. We do offer educational

"We do use Zoom and Teams, but we have found that most candidates would like to have in-person interviews and we are happy to do that. As recruiters we do pre-screening and are able to interview, however our department managers conduct a majority of the interviews," Lucia said. "If we do conduct a remote interview, we would also like the candidate to come to the hospital or clinic at some point as well. We want to make sure that the candidate has all the information they need prior to accepting a position with us."

No matter where the market is, candidates all look for different things, depending upon their age, life experience and career goals. An older candidate, a physician perhaps, may not be as interested in family benefits, whereas a young nurse with thoughts of having a family may want a benefits package with enticements in that area. St. Luke's is competitive, in a competitive market.

"We are very competitive on wages and review wage scales on an annual basis," Lucia said. "We



reimbursement to employees, and we encourage growth. We have very thorough orientation programs for all new employees as well.


"There are many opportunities for growth within the system," Lucia said. "Other than excellent benefit packages, we have an employee wellness program, employee special events committee that plans events for employees and we have great employee recognition programs as well."

As the country moves into the post-pandemic employment market, recruiters face new challenges in finding qualified workers, but they are an optimistic group and find ways to adapt and refine their strategies. St. Luke's Lucia says knowing your organization and its needs are critical.

"I think the key to recruiting in health care is to understand the needs of the hospital or clinic. It is very important to work with leadership and staff within the organization to make sure that you are hiring the most qualified candidates for each position you fill."



"For me, my opportunity is the opportunity to lead this talent team," said Essentia's John Higgins. "What I've enjoyed most about that is being able to build a high-performing group of folks, invest in them, see them grow. See the results coming in that are making a difference for our team members. Being closer and closer to 100% occupancy for our jobs is something that is very reinforcing

for our team members," Higgins concludes. "I know it's impacting patient care in a positive way that we're closing the gaps that we have across our system, so just making that difference with people that are growing and getting better every day." 

Patrick Lapinski is a freelance writer who grew up in Superior.