

# Arizona Daily Star

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BUSINESS, SECTION D

## BUSINESS

# Beacon Group is thriving

## Non-profit that aids the disabled expanding during economic slump

By Becky Pallack  
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

An expanded headquarters, a new store and 200 new jobs.

Those are accomplishments for any business, but they're unexpected for a local non-profit in a slowing economy.

The Beacon Group is having a "growth spurt," its executives said. The group connects disabled people who need supported work and businesses that need entry-level labor.

Its diversified funding stream has helped it thrive, even in the economic slow-down. Beacon is building an expansion to its workshop and offices, which will allow it to add new contracts with businesses for its clients' labor, said CEO Steve King.

It also is expanding its retail operations, and Beacon is looking for businesses to lease some of its redeveloped space, he said.

Here is a look at what's new at Beacon:

### More space, more jobs

Beacon is building 34,000 square feet of new space at its headquarters, 308 W. Glenn St.

The \$4.6 million expansion allows the company to consolidate its operations this year. Beacon sold its building at 25 E. Drachman St. Terms have not been disclosed.

About 50 percent more capacity in the main building will mean up to 200 new job opportunities for clients, King said. Beacon will expand some of its existing labor contracts — such as rivet assembly and document shredding — but also is looking for new ones.

At Beacon, businesses can find inexpensive solutions for filling low-wage, low-skill jobs that often have high turnover, said Patrick McCarthy, development director.

"If you take a headache position and make it stable with someone who wants to work and will always be at work tomorrow, they're all for it," he said.

The work contracts make up about 40 percent of Beacon's budget for pro-

viding services to the disabled, he said.

Beacon's services include job placement, parenting classes and day treatment programs.

### New store open

Beacon bought the former Skate Country building, renovated it and opened a new Value Village furniture thrift store.

Beacon bought the 25,000 square-foot building at 2700 N. Stone Ave. for \$1.28 million in 2005. An 8,000-square-foot space is available for lease.

The original Value Village store, in the North Fourth Avenue shopping district, is next on the list for remodeling. The former office space at the Fourth Avenue store, which earns Beacon about \$1 million a year, will be converted to 8,400 square feet of retail space and leased.

Beacon moved donation sorting and truck-routing operations out of the old store and into the new space, creating new jobs for Beacon clients. Workers will learn to use commercial laundry machines, a skill that could land a disabled person a job in a hotel, hospital or nursing home.

### Growing demand

The demand for Beacon's services is growing.

The company serves 1,600 clients per year, including about 600 who are working. Already this year, 90 new clients have signed on with Beacon, McCarthy said.

"The growth spurt is actually happening before we have the space available," he said.

The non-profit's budget has grown from \$7 million to \$12 million in about five years, he said.

Reasons for growth include increased referrals from existing clients, a growing population and changing attitudes about disabilities. Disabled people are better mainstreamed into the community and are more visible, King said.

Arizona's new laws raising the minimum wage and imposing new sanctions for employers who hire illegal



DAVID SANDERS / ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Marty Espinoza sorts a variety of shoes at the Beacon Group's new distribution center at 2700 N. Stone Ave., the former Skate Country building. Beacon bought the property and has expanded or is expanding others.

immigrants also have increased the demand for disabled workers, he said. The state has exempted employers like Beacon from paying minimum-wage to workers who are essentially in training.

King estimates there are 35,000 disabled people in Pima County who

are unemployed.

"There are people out there, given the opportunity to work and earn, who would choose to work," he said.

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### DID YOU KNOW

The Beacon Group, whose expanded headquarters is at 308 W. Glenn St., shown in the rendering below, has been providing job training and job placement to people with disabilities since 1952 and serves 1,600 clients per year. Businesses that contract with Beacon for labor include the Jim Click Automotive Team, Tucson Electric Power Co. and Alcoa Fastening Systems.

For more information, go to [thebeacongroup.org](http://thebeacongroup.org) or call 622-4374.

