

HR Magazine

JUNE 2013

SHRM.ORG

\$8.95

Hiring FRENZY

Oil Boom Fuels HR Challenges



North Dakota 'Man Camp' Offers One Solution to Housing Shortage

What do you do when you need workers quickly but there's no place for them to stay?

When the oil drilling phase was ramping up in western North Dakota, many contractors turned to crew camps, commonly called "man camps" because the population skews heavily male.

There are 25 crew camps in the Williston area, with almost 9,000 bedroom units. Many rival the size of nearby towns. In fact, many have

their own water supplies, haul out their waste and have their own security forces.

The attached modular units with dorm-like bedrooms often share a cafeteria. Common areas may include large-screen TVs, pool tables, weight rooms and computer centers. Most camps advertise 24-hour security and prohibit alcohol, drugs and weapons.

At the 343-bed Solsten Hotel, a crew camp just south of Williston, the walk-in rate is \$95 a night, including meals. But



Many workers in the Williston, N.D., area call hastily built crew camps their homes.

employers pay discounted rates based on how many of their workers stay there.

Todd Crawford, 46, an electrician from Brainerd, Minn., says the crew camps are clean and convenient. He stayed at the Solsten recently while on a six-week job. Crawford has been going to Williston on and off for about 18 months because there isn't enough work at home.

"If I didn't have this as a fallback, I wouldn't be able to make the house pay-

ment," he says. He works 10 hours a day, six days a week, and has no desire to socialize.

He prefers the security of the crew camp to other options. A previous employer put him up in a rental house with four men to a room, where he witnessed drunken brawls.

Not all workers housed at crew camps are men. About 10 percent are women living in Bear Paw Lodge's 500 units, just

north of Williston. The women share a separate wing. The camp is one of 12 in the state operated by Target Logistics. Camp employees live there, too.

Ernest Salters, 27, of Charleston, S.C., is a chef. He and other camp employees work 12 hours a day, seven days a week, for six weeks straight with one paid day off. Every six weeks, they get a two-week unpaid break. Salters was out of work for a while, and because he likes adventures, he thought he'd give North Dakota a try.