

Help wanted — or not?

IKEA meets local hiring goals, but frustration remains

by **Grace Rauh**

East Palo Alto officials and residents are frustrated that furniture superstore IKEA has not hired more locals for their new site, set to open Aug. 27.

Currently 220 applicants have accepted offers from IKEA. Eighty-seven of those employees — or 39.5 percent — are East Palo Alto residents, according to a staff report by Marie McKenzie, assistant to the East Palo Alto city manager. These numbers put IKEA ahead of hiring goals set by the city's First Source Hiring (FSH) policy that requires all local retailers to hire East Palo Alto residents. FSH requested that IKEA hire at least 30 percent of their employees from East Palo Alto. The store has signed on less than half of their total anticipated staff.

Despite IKEA's success at meeting FSH goals, some city officials and residents are disappointed that more local employees weren't hired already.

"I expected very many more residents to be hired, and I am still looking into why more of our residents have not been hired," East Palo Alto Mayor Pat Foster said.

"What attracted me to IKEA as a business for the city was the number of jobs that I thought would have been available."

IKEA has hired only 19 residents — for a team of 353 — to work on the construction site, and there have been a number of complaints from residents regarding customer service and difficulties accessing hiring information from the store, according to the report.

"One woman who came to the council said she had been told by IKEA that she was overly qualified and she should look into a position in the East Bay at their store," Foster said.

Albert Sanchez, a 40-year East Palo Alto resident, was never enthusiastic about IKEA's arrival, but hoped his teenage son and daughter might gain employment there.

"I got kids 17 and 19-years old, and it's hard for them to get a job right now. I said that'd be their best bet," Sanchez said.

His children have both applied for jobs and are waiting to hear back from IKEA. Sanchez remains skeptical the store will have a positive impact on the community. He already avoids driving near it because of traffic buildup.

"And the big IKEA, what is that going to do? If it employs people, yeah that would be good," he said.

IKEA community-relations officials were not available for comment. ■

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