



NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Celina Shands Gradijan
(858) 793-6694 celina@fullcapacitymarketing.com

New Training Facility Brightens Coachella Valley's Economic Future *Brand strategy brings community support for service sectors*

Macy's. JCPenney. Charlotte Russe. Bath and Body Works. Coachella Valley's Westfield Palm Desert sports the usual retail giants, but is getting ready to add a unique spin to their line-up, with a special partner that has a mission to put the Valley on the map with legendary customer service. The October 27th opening of the Institute for Sales and Service Excellence (ISSE) at Westfield Palm Desert, brings to the mall a unique and regionally-tailored answer to the traditionally fluid retail and tourism industries in the Coachella Valley area. In response to local business needs for customer service and technical work skills, this highly-visible, recruitment, training and placement facility will be a "one-stop" shop for prospective employees, employers and local businesses.

A branch of the College of the Desert's Center for Training and Development, the **ISSE** is a partnership between the U.S. Department of Labor, the NRF Foundation (National Retail Federation), College of the Desert, California Community College's Economic and Workforce Development Programs, Riverside County Workforce Development Center, Riverside Workforce Development Board, Riverside County Economic Development Agency, and the Westfield Group. "The vision for this project was spurred by the amazing growth that the Coachella Valley has seen in the service sectors, including hospitality and retail," said Pam LiCalsi, Dean, Center for Training and Development, College of the Desert. "The demand for a qualified workforce in these service sectors continues to grow".

And growing it is. The Valley's employment rate was higher than both Riverside County and California as a whole. Lou Hirsh of *The Desert Sun* reported, "The inland Riverside-San Bernardino County area, that includes the Valley, retained its status among the state's top job creators, adding 39,800 new positions since July 2005. Gains were led by professional and business services, construction and retail." (Valley Employment, 19 August 2006). In the retail, hospitality and services sector, employment is expected to continue its positive trend with a nearly 6 percent growth in jobs—a total of 12,900 new jobs according to the April 2006 *Inland Empire Quarterly Economic Report*.

Dedicated specifically to addressing this growth within the service sectors, the ISSE is the place for businesses to find unsurpassed service training and certified candidates, and for job seekers to discover rewarding careers. The ISSE delivers National Certification Standards curriculum set by the National Retail Federation Foundation in retail and customer service, as well as the American Hotel and Lodging Association in hospitality and tourism. The state-of-the-art 6,000 square foot facility offers basic and customized service skills training, skills assessments, staff certifications, English-as-a-Second-Language, and a host of customer service training.

Full Capacity Marketing, Inc. (FCM), a national marketing and communications firm designed the brand strategy for the ISSE. "We wanted to make sure that the ISSE was well positioned in the community for maximum support," said President/CEO Celina Shands Gradijan. Outside of the unique identity and tagline, the new ISSE Web site provides the community with a method to engage and support the facility through our Industry Advisory Councils. Having a voice in how our training dollars are deployed is creating quite a buzz among regional service sector businesses."

The ISSE executive staff plans to monitor the return on investment for local businesses and job seekers. "Where else can a manager go to train current employees, find resources on teamwork, and recruit new hires that have portable, industry specific skills?", said Leslie Larrabee, ISSE Director. "We're finding that our service businesses are completely behind the vision of the ISSE. In fact, we already have several businesses that are offering in-kind and cash contributions to maintain the sustainability of the ISSE beyond our initial grant."

One of those investors is Tom Crouse, manager, WalMart Palm Desert "We are thrilled to be one of the early investors in the ISSE. As a Gold Member we'll receive multiple discounts on staff training and services, a worthwhile investment in customer service that will pay off for WalMart in a highly competitive retail market." Carlos Ortega, City Manager City of Palm Desert agrees. "Palm Desert is a focal point for retail sales and tourism in the Coachella Valley. The City recognizes the need for qualified and trained customer service staff for the retail and hotel, and is proud to be an ISSE sponsor."

The grand opening and ribbon cutting ceremony was well attended on October 27, 2006 with a full house of businesses, community leaders and political constituencies. Activities included facility tours, introductions to the staff, food, and a ribbon cutting ceremony. For a tour of the facility, contact ISSE at www.ISSExcellence.com

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