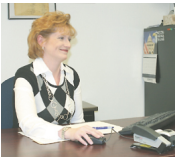


Daily Leader photo/Robert Pierce Synergy owner and president Denise Smith works at her desk at the business's office at 111 E. Tucker Road in north Liberal. Smith also operates Tax Centers of America in that same location.



By ROBERT PIERCE • Daily Leader

Many immigrants have made their way to the United States within the last 20 years, mostly to seek employment with American companies, and this means employers need documentation to allow those people to work in this country.

To help with this process, Denise Smith opened her company, Synergy Inc., which she now runs along with Tax Centers of America in the Tucker Plaza in north Liberal, in January 2008.

Smith said Synergy is primarily focused on helping employers get work permits for their employees.

“I can help resolve other types of immigration issues, but it’s primarily focused on employer-based sponsorships for undocumented workers and getting their documents into

them,” she said.

Smith said when she is working with an employer, she is working to get them an employer certification through the Department of Labor.

“That’s one aspect of it,” she said. “That also involves recruiting services. We can also do I-9 audits.”

Smith said there are several steps involved in getting to immigration services, work permits and visas.

“I work very closely with immigration attorneys and a wide range of immigration issues,” she said. “I’m very involved with legislative issues and advocacy issues.”

Smith said many of her clients are in agriculture.

“That’s primarily what I work in, so I’m pretty much involved in pro- active, almost lobbyist, activities when it comes to immigration and farm-related issues,” she said.

Smith grew up in farming, and she said she became involved in documentation through that experience.

“My dad came to me and asked me to help get him some documents with some workers that worked on his farm,” she said. “I have a 15-year background as a paralegal. I have a wide range of contacts within the legal field.”

Smith said she began researching how to get documentation for immigrant workers.

“It kind of developed from assisting him in that process,” she said.

“As soon as I started doing that kind of work, it kind of traveled word of mouth that I was working in that area. There’s such a demand and such a need that area that people just came to me in flocks for assistance.”

Smith is on the board for the Farmers, Agriculture, Conservation and Technology Conference, and she spoke at last week’s event at the Seward County Activity Center.

“What I try to share the attendees in that conference is giving them an overview of immigration itself – kind of the problems that we face with immigration and challenges in that environment that we have,”

she said.

Smith said she also tries to share some of the possible reform issues that could be looked at in the near future.

“I think in this new administration, we have some reform coming to us,” she said. “Some of the solutions they have available to them.”

Smith said the system currently in place is extensively broken.

“It has been broken for a long, long time, but I think that we all have to be pro-active when it comes to immigration issues and what they can do to help assist in pushing forward reform,” she said.

In addition to F.A.C.T., Smith has spoken to chambers of commerce, Rotary and education groups.

“I try to make myself available as much as I can in speaking because I think there’s a lot of misconceptions about immigration,” she said.

“It’s a very polarizing and divisive topic. Everybody has many opinions about it. It’s a very hot political topic.”

Smith said she believes with more education, possible solutions can be found.

“I think as more time comes forward on it, we’re going to see more and more dialogue about it, and hopefully, that’ll move forward to some reform and solutions,” she said. “I just think there has to be more people talking about it.”

Smith said she currently has more than 100 employers as clients.

“No one can immigrate into the United States without a sponsor, whether it’s a family member or an employer,” she said.

Smith said she also has 250 employees whose files she is working on currently.

“That’s come just within a year of starting this business,” she said.

“I expect it to explode over the next year.”

Smith said she believes one of the greatest things people can do is try to be in touch with the issue and be pro-active about it.

“One of the things I’m getting more and more involved in is staying in touch with legislators and trying to be pro-active on it, not only on a community, but a state and national basis,” she said. “We have to speak out about the issue, or we won’t get the changes that we want to see happen.”