



Click here for

CENTRE DAILY TIMES

Our Local Channels →

News

Business

Sports

Entertainment

Living

C

| Help | Contact Us | Site Index | Archives | Newspaper

Centre Daily Times (State College, PA)

March 14, 1998

Page: 7B

MODELING FIRM TO MAKE REFUNDS IN JOB-OFFER DEAL

Excel Model Management will give refunds to people who responded to its help-wanted ads and paid for the agency's training, but never got the promised jobs.

By LISA HAARLANDER

Centre Daily Times Pennsylvania Attorney General Mike Fisher announced Friday that Excel, 300 S. Pugh St., State College, signed an agreement with his office to settle the alleged violations and paid \$2,045.50 in civil fines and investigation costs.

The company's agreement to settle the complaints does not necessarily indicate an admission of wrongdoing.

"It appears the help-wanted ads were being used to bring people into a training program rather than providing them with employment," said Deputy Attorney General Barry Creany in Ebensburg, who investigated 22 complaints against the agency.

For instance, he alleges a brochure from the agency cited a 95 percent job placement record, yet the majority of people never got paying jobs. Instead, they were offered training that could cost up to \$835, Creany said.

Part of that training involved charging aspiring models a \$350 fee to take their pictures. The photographer got \$200 and the agency got \$150, he said.

"Legitimate agencies make money from models' commissions," Creany said. "It's not common practice for an agency to charge the consumers for the photographers or receive a commission from the photographers."

Creany's office received about a dozen complaints after Excel opened an office in Johnstown in early 1997 and closed it in October, he said.

Excel's owner, **Kelli Harman**, said the consumer complaints are misleading and people do not know the real story.

"This is nothing but a witch hunt and complete defamation of character," said Harman, adding she only signed the agreement and paid the fines to get the state agency off her back. "It's a personal crusade against me."

She also said that some models did not have to spend any money because they already had a portfolio and what are called "comp cards," the equivalent of a model's business card that is sent

to prospective employers.

According to consumer complaints, Excel allegedly:

Placed ads seeking models to work for \$10 to \$75 per hour while numerous customers already under contract had not received any work assignments.

Failed to disclose in ads that fees of up to \$835 for videotaped auditions, training seminars and photo shoots would be required to be eligible for modeling assignments.

Failed to disclose that the agency received a discount from the hair salon customers were required to use.

Misrepresented that customerers would receive gainful employment if they went through the training program.

Charged customers excessive interest and late fees on payment plan balances.

Attempted to collect debts from relatives who had signed contracts along with their minor children, even though they were not legally liable for payments.

Accepted deposits for a soap opera acting seminar, then failed to refund customers when the seminar did not take place.

FOR MORE INFO

Information: To see if you are eligible for a refund, call the state Bureau of Consumer Protection at (800) 441-2555 or 949-7900.

Copyright (c) 1998 Centre Daily Times