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| Dow Jones 7,936.83 -64.03 | S&P 825.44 -0.44 | Nasdaq 1,494.43 +18.01 |
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STOCKS / A13

COMING
TOMORROW

Howard Lippin of Stamford has trademarked TaxiLite, a product designed to help people hail cabs safely and easily.

IN BUSINESS

The ADVOCATE

Au Pair service adds to its family

Stamford-based company grows during recession

By Richard Lee
STAFF WRITER

The economy may be hurting, but Stamford-based Au Pair in America is counting that as a key reason for its decision to expand to 10 new markets across the United States.

"As a result of the current economy, we are hearing from more and more families who are now dual-earning households that suddenly need child

care, which is both flexible and affordable," said Ruth Ferry, senior vice president and director of Au Pair. "Our program meets those needs and offers host families a variety of programs to suit their specific requirements."

Hiring an au pair can be an enriching cultural exchange for a family, she

said. Au pairs, from ages 18 to 26, come from more than 60 countries.

The agency has placed more than 80,000 caregivers with U.S. host families since its founding 22 years ago. Providing as many as 45 hours of weekly service, au pairs are paid \$335 per week.

The addition of the 10 new markets expands the program to 40 states, said Michael Liberty, spokesman for Au Pair and the American Institute for Foreign Study, a privately owned U.S.-based company with annual revenue more than \$180 million.

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Business News

Au Pair

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"We were getting a lot of requests from those areas for au pair child care. An au pair is less expensive than a nanny," he said, adding that there also is a one-time program fee of \$7,695 for J-1 visa processing, background check, insurance and community counselor services. "We have interviewers all over the world. It's in everybody's best interest to be super careful. We don't want an au pair in a bad situation."

Given the global economic downturn, Nicholas Perna, economic adviser to Webster Financial Corp. in Waterbury, said he believed there is an abundance of women trained in child care who are interested in coming to the United States. And many families

More supervision

■ The unit of the American Institute for Foreign Study that supplies caregivers for children has added Albuquerque/Santa Fe, N.M.; Aspen/Vail/Glenwood Springs, Colo.; Greenville/Spartanburg, S.C.; Jacksonville, Fla.; Las Vegas; Miami/Fort Lauderdale, Fla.; Pittsburgh; Reno, Nev.; Sacramento/Stockton, Calif.; and Santa Barbara/Santa Maria, Calif. to its service areas.

across the country, with both parents holding well-paying jobs, need to find reliable child care as the economy declines, according to Perna. Those circumstances create a business opportunity for Au Pair.

"Even in the worst of times there are companies starting or expanding," said Perna, a Ridgefield resident.

Au Pair, which has offices in five countries and a network of more than 600 employees, offers a Web-based

matching process and orientation for au pairs and host families.

Au Pair has made a good move with its expansion, said Greg Furman, founder and chairman of the Luxury Marketing Council, which counts 870 brands and 3,000 chief executive officers as members.

"I think it's a smart move on their part," he said.

Regulated by the U.S. Department of State's Exchange Visitor Program, the au pair program gives young women the opportunity to live in the United States for as long as two years as live-in child care providers.

Each candidate must have at least 200 hours of recent, documented child-care experience and speak English, according to Liberty.

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