Everyone should get this experience' Two immigrants with computer skills grateful for federal program that helped them land jobs

By Kerry Thompson

RECORD STAFF

Zeljko Prica and Rageeb Rasheed are both happy they could start new lives in Canada.

And that includes getting jobs at a Waterloo software company

Price, 39, and Rasheed, 29, were part of the New Canadian Program, funded by Human Resources Development Canada. The program introduces new Canadians who have professional training to job search techniques in this area, and then helps them find a job.

And the two men are both happy the program exists. "In our own country we know how to do everything. But here, we don't know how to find companies, connect with employers, or write resumes," said Rasheed. "Everyone should get this experience."

And it is these helpful tips that landed both the men at Waterloo Maple, Prica as a quality assurance analyst, and Rasheed as a programmer. Although both men have university degrees, they needed some help getting on their feet.

Both left their home countries because of political strife. Rasheed, originally from Kurdistan, north of Iraq, was lecturing math at Omar AlMukhtar University in Libya before he came to the Kitchener area.

"Because of sanctions, many computer companies couldn't get new information. Our field needs daily information," he said.

Prica left Yugoslavia with a degree in business administration and information technology, to further his career and his life in Canada. "I think it offers

OPEN HOUSE

The New Canadian Program is holding an open house Saturday to celebrate its achievements. It runs from I-4 p.m., at 12 Dupont St. W., in Waterloo. The eight-year-old program teaches jobsearch skills to immigrants with professional training.

a better future," he said.

The program, which has been around for eight years, places the participants in non-paying jobs for three months, after they complete two months of classroom training in skills such as how to market themselves to employers.

More than 600 new Canadians, all professionals, have gone through the program, while close to 700 local companies have provided the placements.

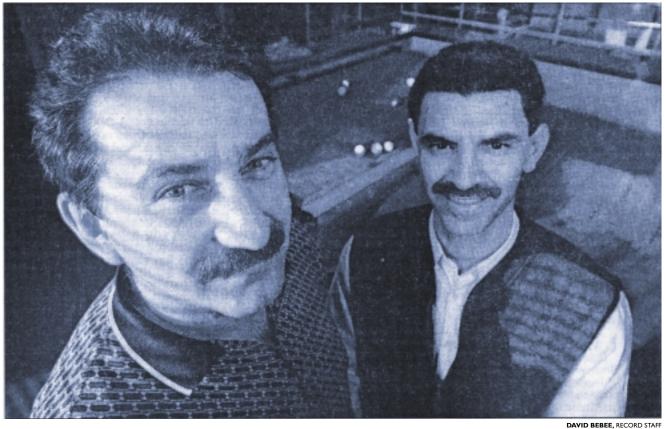
Nancy Campbell, grants officer with the Waterloo Region District School Board which provides support through its adult education division, said she prefers to call it a co-op program rather than a workfare-type program. Many of the participants are on social assistance.

"If they are not getting social assistance, there's a fund, made up of donations from companies that benefit from the program, to pay some expenses," Campbell said.

HRDC grants for the New Canadian program currently amount to about \$300,000 a year, she said.

After the initial job placement, the average hiring rate is 74 per cent.

Prica and Rasheed were part of that



Zeljko Price (left) and Rageeb Rasheed found jobs at the computer company, Waterloo Maple, under the New Canadian Program. They both enjoy the friendly atmosphere of the software firm including a pool table that is popular with employees on breaks.

success rate.

Brenda Gilmore, the intake co-ordinator for the New Canadian Program, said the main jobs they focus on are those in engineering, computer programming and the sciences. The only requirements are that the participants have landed immigrant status, have been in Canada for less than five years, and are over the age of 25.

"The program has a good reputation," she said.

Both Price and Rasheed feel the same way.

"This country opened the door for me," said Prica. And Rasheed said he is

grateful to the program for getting him a job.

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