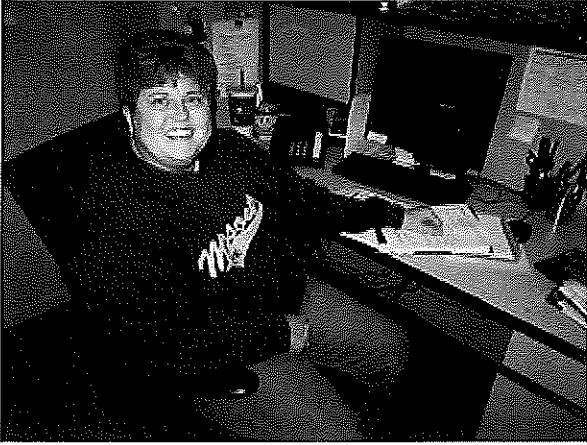


# Sheltered workshop braces for state cuts

## Photos



Tony Brown

NoCoMo Industries General Manager Nicki Samson is traveling to Jefferson City this week where she will join other sheltered workshop managers across the state in lobbying officials to hold the line on anticipated spending cuts.

Northwest Missouri State University is not the only state-assisted institution in Maryville that could feel the effects of severely curtailed state spending as Gov. Jay Nixon and lawmakers in the General Assembly attempt to close a half-billion-dollar budget gap.

NoCoMo Industries, a sheltered workshop serving about 50 certified employees diagnosed with developmental disabilities, could take a significant hit to its bottom line as well.

NoCoMo General Manager Nicki Samson will be in Jefferson City Tuesday and Wednesday for a quarterly meeting of the Missouri Association of Sheltered Workshop Managers. She said Friday that the session will focus largely on efforts to maintain current levels of state support for workshops statewide.

While at the Capitol, Samson said she and her fellow managers expect to learn exactly what Nixon's recommendation will be with regard to sheltered workshop spending, which has remained essentially flat over the past three years.

She said MASWM lobbyist Randy Hylton has warned the managers to prepare for "a real fight to hang on to what we have."

Sheltered workshops in Missouri do not, like universities and other state institutions and agencies, receive direct appropriations.

They are, rather, funded on the basis of a \$19-a-day per diem for each certified employee that is pro rated based on a six-hour workday.

Over the last few years, Samson said, the last dollar of that per diem was not paid due to budget constraints. The reduction amounts to a total of \$4 million in cuts for sheltered workshops statewide.

At NoCoMo, Samson said, the inability of the state to fully cover per diem billings subtracted about \$14,000 from the workshop's bottom line in fiscal 2011. She fears that this year's reduction could range between \$20,000 and \$28,000.

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Since the workshop has a half-million-dollar budget, that won't close the doors. But it could force the operation, which is projecting a profit this year of only \$30,000, to scale back operations.

NoCoMo currently has a staff/worker ratio of about one supervisor for every ten employees, and Samson said a sixth supervisor is needed. Further reductions in state funding, she said, will prevent expansion and could even force the workshop to reduce the number of certified workers it can serve due to health and safety considerations.

Samson said she will not add workers or accept contracts if NoCoMo is incapable of paying enough supervisors to ensure a safe production environment.