



In Session: Lisa Meadows at BankWork\$ class at downtown L.A.'s Expo Center.

## Window Opens for Bank Tellers

Job training program puts participants on front line of finance.

About 10 years ago, **Les Biller**, then a newly retired former chief operating officer at **Wells Fargo & Co.**, thought there was a way his old career could help people in challenging circumstances climb out of them. He figured there must be a job in banking that requires a skill set that could be taught quickly, was transferable among banks and had real upside.

The answer: the bank teller. And that led him to team with the **Jewish Vocational Service of Los Angeles** to launch the BankWork\$ training program, which last month

graduated its 50th class. It's an eight-week crash course that prepares job seekers, mostly the unemployed and people from poor neighborhoods, for teller positions – and maybe beyond.

"It was a career that had a ladder," said **Claudia Finkel**, the chief operating officer of Jewish Vocational Service of Los Angeles. "It did not require a college degree. It was with large institutions where people could advance throughout their career and move in any direction. And there are lots of banks in the city, so people didn't have to move."

Finkel and Biller brought **Lisa Meadows**, a former high school instructor and Union Bank executive, on board as the program's associate director. Meadows wrote the curriculum, and BankWork\$ got its start.

The first classes were small, with only about 12 to

15 students taking part. Today, there are two sessions, each with 30 to 60 students. More than 75 percent of BankWork\$ alumni are still employed at the bank that hired them a year after graduating. That's higher than the overall retention rate for bank employees in those jobs.

Next up for BankWork\$: taking the program national through a franchise model. They plan to be in Seattle, San Francisco and Phoenix by the end of the year.

And it's not just aspiring tellers that are benefiting. The partner banks, which include L.A.-area institutions such as **City National Bank**, are using BankWork\$ as a sort of employee training program.

"Someone walks in and says, 'How do I get a job?' and they're being referred to our program," Meadows said. — *Matt Pressberg*

## Travel Site Maps Out Plan For Apparel

Luxury Link teams up with Gilt to fashion clothes collaboration.

Online-travel booking site **Luxury Link** can help you get booked into a high-end hotel in Marrakech, Morocco, or a rainforest lodge in Costa Rica. Now it wants to help you get outfitted for your trip.

The Playa Vista company this month debuted its partnership with New York online retailer **Gilt Groupe Inc.**, which sells brand-name clothes and accessories at heavy discounts.

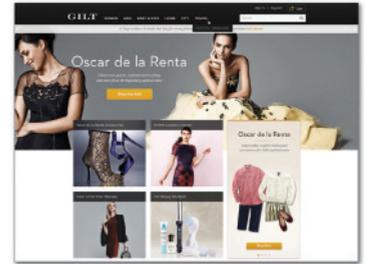
"Once you bought a specific trip, we'll be able to say, 'Hey, do you have everything you need to go skiing?'" said **Scott Morrow**, Luxury

Link's chief executive.

Though Gilt approached Morrow with the opportunity in June, Luxury Link still had to compete with about a half-dozen other online travel agencies also vying for a partnership.

"They were looking to really elevate the offer and do something that would take travel to a new level," he said.

The deal, which came together late last year, could be a boon for Luxury Link, which has roughly 1 million members. The relationship allows the firm to earn a share of the revenue from



New Direction: Gilt clothing website.

Gilt sales that originate on the travel booking site. Gilt, which has 9 million registered users, will also refer members to Luxury Link, taking a share of those transactions.

"Gilt is an enormous company," Morrow said. "This has the potential to grow our business by as much as 100 percent on this deal alone."

— *Cale Ottens*

## Denim Maker Forges Links To Greens

AG Jeans swings for golf wear market with new line for men.

AG Jeans in downtown Los Angeles is going green. Or, rather, to the green.

The premium denim



Golf Club: AG Green Label clothes.

maker this month announced the launch of its first men's golf collection, **AG Green Label**.

Denim brands aren't usually big players in golf apparel, but **Samuel Ku**, president and creative director at AG, said he is passionate about golf and felt there is a lack of stylish golf apparel for men.

"We really felt that there was a white space in the market of stylish, high-quality golf clothing that could be worn on and off the golf course," Ku said. "Many of our customers are golfers and often play golf in our pants and polos. We felt we had a built-in customer base

that was ready for something fresh and new."

The newly launched spring collection of polos, cashmere sweaters, vests and trousers in colors such as white, navy and forest green doesn't scream sport, Ku said, which is important.

"It's clothing that you can wear to dinner or drinks, and people won't look at you and think you came straight from the golf course," he said.

Prices range from \$118 for a polo shirt to as much as \$278 for a sport vest. It will be carried at AG's retail locations and online as well as at major retailers including **Nordstrom**, **Saks Fifth Avenue** and **Trendy Golf USA**.

AG is also considering a golf line for women.

— *Subrina Hudson*

## Chilly Reception for Packers Fan

**Donald Bizub** is such an avid **Green Bay Packers** football fan that he purposefully seeks out advisory clients in cities where the Packers will be playing in a given season.

But while attending a home playoff game this month in frigid Green Bay, Wis., not far from where he grew up, Bizub, 49,

suffered a momentary lapse that cost him in Packers fan cred.

After successfully using his contacts to score a field pass, an elated Bizub posed with the team's cheerleaders. But while they were bundled up in traditional green outfits, Bizub had on a bright blue ski jacket with a small

Green Bay scarf.

Bizub, a Pasadena securities brokerage executive, had decided to wear the ski jacket



Bizub: Blue about not being green.

because of the forecast for bitter cold. Back in 2008, he attended a Packers home playoff game where the kickoff temperature was minus 1 degree with a wind chill of minus 23 degrees; it was so cold that when he took off a glove to briefly handle a cup, he got frostbite that hurts him to this day.

"I was determined not to repeat that, hence the ski jacket," he said.

Bad move. For the Packers were playing the **Dallas Cowboys**, whose road colors, of course, are blue and white.

"I posted a few pictures on Facebook and my account traffic blew up with friends dishing my blue jacket," Bizub said. "So I bought some Packer swag at halftime to cover it up." That swag included a jersey that he put on over the jacket.

The irony: The kickoff temperature turned out to be a much warmer than expected 25 degrees.

All was forgiven in the end as the Packers defeated the Cowboys to move on to the conference finals, although the Packers lost that game to the Seattle Seahawks.

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CHARLES CRUMPLEY

### Travel Hits Home

**Ryan Espinoza**, a tax manager in the L.A. office of global accounting firm **Ernst & Young**, spent seven weeks in Buenos Aires, Argentina, this fall as an adviser to an **Airbnb Inc.**-style company called **Segundo Hogar**, which means "Second Home."

Though his trip was part of a company program in which employees act as advisers for promising entrepreneurs in emerging

markets, Espinoza said the trip impacted his personal life, too.

The 28-year-old said he appreciated the close bonds Argentines share with their family and friends, which are characterized by long, intense conversations at late-night cafes in which the tables spill out onto the sidewalk.

"You have dinner between 9 p.m. and 11 p.m.," Espinoza said. "After that, you'll go out to a café and further the conversation."

He spent hours talking with groups of people from work and his apartment community.

During one of those midnight chats, he discovered how much value his co-workers and

Argentines in general place on traveling outside their city and country. Now, he and his wife are hoping to take their two kids on an extended trip at least once a year.

"We want to get outside our comfort zone," he said.

Another highlight of his trip was watching a soccer match at the raucous home stadium of **Boca Juniors**, Argentina's most-well-known team.

"They were chanting and cheering and banging drums for the full 90 minutes," Espinoza said. "You can literally feel it."

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Espinoza