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Job workshop builds skills, hope for 350 attendees

Signs point to more people getting work

By Sarah Lawson

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The fact that 50 fewer job hunters showed up to this year's Build Your Skills event than last year's was good news to KentuckianaWorks Director Michael Gritton. It means people are finding jobs, he said.

Next year, he hopes the city doesn't need the event at all.

Friday's event provided job training, interviewing and résumé writing tips, help with networking skills and career counseling to 350 job seekers. It was hosted by KentuckianaWorks, the Louisville Urban League and U.S. Rep. John Yarmuth's office.

Six major employers sent representatives to talk about more than 1,000 job openings. The job seekers ranged in age from their 20s to their 70s.

"We know that economic conditions are still pretty slow, so it's not surprising that we have 300-plus people showing up," Gritton said.

One of the people seeking advice on his résumé was Joe Straughan, who said he has worked in advertising and marketing for 25 years in New York, Washington and Chicago. He said he's been to so many career fairs that they're becoming a blur.

"Right now, there's an avalanche of job seekers," Straughan said.

He said employers are interviewing so many applicants and receiving so many résumés, "they don't have time to go through all the beautiful words."

By 9 a.m., the 10 tables in a room at Jefferson Community & Technical College looked like a speed-dating exercise, with career advisers giving 15-minute résumé-audit sessions. When one job seeker would leave, another would sit down, résumé in hand.

"The most helpful thing that the person gave me was to condense my résumé because it seemed I just had a lot of stuff that I just put on there, and she just told me to condense it but make sure it applies to the job I'm looking for," said Crystal Newman, 21, a University of Louisville senior.

Newman said she wants to earn a doctorate in psychology and work in counseling in Louisville.

Louisville retiree Leon Morrow, who volunteers with his wife, Rita, through the AARP, was there to provide career advice to people over 50. He said he's volunteered at career fairs all over Kentucky, and his biggest challenge is turning around the attitude of older job seekers who are discouraged because of their age.

Older employees have an advantage because they have more experience, are usually more responsible and often have less personal baggage than their younger counterparts, Morrow said.

At career fairs two or three years ago, he saw attorneys, accountants and other professionals seeking work. This year he's seen fewer of those kinds of applicants, and more people seeking lower-paid jobs, he said.

"That means most of those people (from previous years) found jobs," Morrow said.

Health insurance company Connexions announced at the event that it has 750 openings for sales jobs across Kentucky, and it was offering perks such as training or tuition stipends.

Gritton said it's encouraging that health care companies aren't just looking for people with specialized skills anymore — they're looking to fill entry-level positions, too.

"We're looking for any signs of encouragement we can," he said.

Reporter Sarah Lawson can be reached at (502) 582-4608.

Additional Facts

Résumé-writing tips

1. Customize your résumé for each employer.
2. Put a summary of your skills in five to seven bullet points at the top of the page.
3. Don't just list and describe your previous jobs — list your accomplishments at each place you worked.
4. Highlight your skills that are transferrable to different employers, such as your abilities as a problem solver and a communicator.
5. If you've stayed in the same field from job to job, organize your résumé chronologically. If you've changed fields, organize it by skills.

Source: Metropolitan College
