



TODD PONATH/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Road to employment

Take advantage of services to
navigate a job search

By ERIN LAMB
elamb@cpgroup.com

Waukesha County – A twenty-something woman with bleached-blond hair made her way into the Workforce Development Center in Waukesha County a few weeks ago holding a sleeping baby nestled in a bright pink fleece blanket, and stepped up to the front desk. In the corner of the room, a well-groomed middle-aged woman told her daughter she'd be back soon and headed to one of



Turn to PAGE A36

Make your full-time job looking for a job

From PAGE A1

the computer labs with a career counselor, while an older gentleman waited, perusing the newspaper job ads scattered across the few tables in the front lobby.

These three people, and an ever-growing number like them, know the trials and tribulations of today's job market and realize they can't go it alone.

With the latest rates showing unemployment in Waukesha County at 6.1 percent – up from 3.8 percent a year ago – more and more people are navigating the deep abyss of the job market and turning for help to do so.

Waukesha County Technical College Career Center reports seeing a 44-percent increase in the use of its career center services in October through December 2008 compared to the same time in 2007.

"People coming into the Career Center mirror the unemployment rates," said John Pritchett, a **WCTC** career counselor in the Workforce Development Center. "We're certainly seeing more people coming in."

"People coming into the Career Center mirror the unemployment rates."

John Pritchett
WCTC career counselor in the Workforce Development Center

Staci Eggert-Dziedzic, marketing manager of W-O-W Workforce Development Inc., said the Workforce Development Center is a good starting point for job-seekers. It is a one-stop shop because a number of different organizations are housed under one roof.

Route to Success

About 40 people have completed Route to Success, a program that provides practical advice and techniques to those who have lost their jobs after years of service or those stuck in low-paying or temporary positions as they seek to gain more permanent employment.

Carol Smith, who heads the program, said the United Way offered her a grant for the pilot program. Smith partners with Scott Nissen of Nissen & Associates Staffing and a number of other area businesses such as banks, churches, schools and mental health organizations to offer Route to Success. The five-week program helps the underemployed gain financial stability and prevents people from having to rely on community-based programs such as food stamps or rent assistance, Smith said.

There are numerous other resources and programs available – many of them free or low-cost – to help job-seekers navigate the often confusing and frustrating process of finding a new job or career path.

Road to employment

Elizabeth Witt, 28, of Hartland was laid off from her customer service representative job in Sussex last spring.

"When you find you're losing your job and you're not expecting it, it's kind of a shock," Witt said. "It's kind of hard to wrap your head around it. At first, it's overwhelming."

After a layoff, experts recommend taking time to deal with the job loss.

"The day you get a termination notice ... get some support from family and friends and realize it isn't your fault due to the economic situation," said Smith. "It's a grieving process just like any loss." Take a few days to get over the shock, but don't sit around too long, Smith advised.

To avoid any loss of benefits, the state recommends applying for unemployment the first week one is laid off. Apply for benefits by phone by calling (414) 438-7700 or online at unemployment.wisconsin.gov.

Witt filed for unemployment, and her husband, an audiovisual technician at a hospital, took a second job delivering newspapers to make ends meet.

Soon before Witt left her position, the Workforce Development Center sent a team of professionals to her workplace that explained to Witt – and other dislocated workers at the company – that they had options.

Eggert-Dziedzic said Rapid Response



TODD PONATH/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

JOB HUNT – Bill Meier of Franklin works with a Workforce Development Center representative to find a new job Monday morning at the center in Pewaukee. Meier said he is on his 22nd week of looking for a job. **On the cover:** Greg Wall of Pewaukee (left) and Meier use the computers to search for a job.

teams can be sent to companies with layoffs of 25 or more people. The teams help workers understand their options and provide information about services and programs.

Witt learned she'd be eligible to receive funds for training through the Workforce Investment Act and decided to take advantage of the program.

Witt took into consideration industry employment projections and more importantly, what she'd always wanted to do, and decided to change career paths.

For some people, being laid off is the force that provides them the opportunity to try something new, said Pritchett.

Career centers often offer services that match one's interests and abilities with corresponding occupations.

"Really look at everything right now," Smith said. "Your pink slip is an opportunity slip perhaps."

Job-seekers should evaluate their abilities to see if they fit the local labor market and might want to consider training to upgrade skills or make a complete career change.

Robert Ehler of Oconomowoc worked at four different companies that all went out of business. Even before he was laid off from his last job as a truss designer in Marshall, he started to take classes at **WCTC** to get out of an industry he'd been in the past 10 years. He hopes to eventually do something with building design or renovation.

Witt decided to move away from customer service and chose to enroll in a phlebotomy program at **Waukesha County Technical College**.

"It is a pretty big switch from customer service to sticking needles in people's arms," said Witt.

Witt decided she wanted to do this job a couple of years ago, and at the time, even job-shadowed someone in West Allis, but it ended up not working out, she said.

While she loved the people she worked with at her former company, Witt said the layoff was a good thing because it forced her to do something different, and it might offer her more opportunity.

"It's something that they're not going to outsource ever. They're not going to create a machine to do it," she said. "I feel like there's job security."

Once Witt goes through her clinicals and completes the program, she'll start to look for jobs.

If unemployed and job-searching, finding a job should become the full-time job, said Eggert-Dziedzic.

"Do something every day that involves a job search," she said.

Career services, like those at The Workforce Development Center, offer workshops and advice on resumes, cover letters, online job-searching techniques, managing resources and more.

"We're here to help people that are in transition," said Pritchett.

Keep a log on the refrigerator on what you've done and are going to do each day, Smith recommended. Don't go to bed without knowing what you're going to do the next day, she said.

In the current job market, it's important to do out-of-the-box thinking.

"If you're doing what everybody else in the pack is doing, it's going to take you a long time to find a job," Smith said.

Job-seekers should network, cold-call interesting companies, go on informational interviews and volunteer in order to build connections and potential job contacts, Smith said.

Despite the current economic forecast, there's still reason to be optimistic about job prospects.

There are positions available, and people are getting jobs, Pritchett said. It just may take a little longer, he said.

Eggert-Dziedzic estimated it takes about nine to 12 months to land a job.

Unemployment rate in Waukesha County



2009



2008