



CLACKAMAS COUNTY NEWS

Oregon local news from Wilsonville, West Linn, Sandy & Oregon City

Program draws jobless from all backgrounds

by Nicole Dungca, The Oregonian
Thursday July 16, 2009, 6:30 AM



NICOLE DUNGCA/THE OREGONIAN Richard White of Wilsonville receives advice on his resume from Linda Starr, instructor of a resume-writing and interviewing class at **Clackamas Community College**. The classes have seen a jump in enrollment as more Oregonians find themselves jobless.

If you ask Richard White of Wilsonville, this is a new kind of job market.

"I've always just made a few phone calls and gotten a job. But now it's so hard to get your foot in the door."

A few weeks ago, the 49-year-old unemployed electrician sat in a Clackamas Community College classroom and watched as instructor Linda Starr bullet-pointed the important parts of a resume: relevant skills, an objective statement, tasks performed on the job.

He looked down at his own resume, a bare-bones list of employers, dates and phone numbers.

When Starr approached him for a one-on-one session later in the class, he warned her: "They sent me here because they looked at my resume and said, 'You don't have one.'"

White, who has been jobless for several weeks, now has a more professional resume, but he remains caught in one of the worst job markets in decades. In the latest available reporting period, Oregon had the second-highest unemployment rate in the nation, 12.4 percent, behind only Michigan's 14.1 percent.

The rate in Clackamas County was 11.4 percent, meaning one out of every nine workers was without a job. That adds up to roughly 16,000 Clackamas County residents looking for work.

In June, 2,133 of those people were seeking services at WorkSource Clackamas, a network of public and private organizations.

Enrollment in various job search classes -- ranging from basic computer skills to advice about networking -- has more than doubled since last year, said Roni Wilhelm, a manager of the WorkSource Clackamas program integrated with **Clackamas Community College**.

In May, 289 people attended the free workshops co-sponsored by WorkSource Clackamas and the college.

Courses previously were held at WorkSource's Oregon City office on High Street, but the surge in enrollment forced WorkSource in March to add sessions and move to the college, said Wilhelm.

Nonprofit agencies, such as the Clackamas County office of Easter Seals, an advocacy group for people with disabilities, have also seen an uptick. All 47 spaces have filled up in an Easter Seals program that helps elderly disabled adults re-enter the workforce, according to Catherine Todd, a director of the Oregon chapter.

A number of those who walk through the WorkSource doors arrive for mandatory orientations after applying for unemployment benefits, but others are simply searching for help in a hyper-competitive job market.

Many WorkSource customers have been steadily employed for years in areas that have taken a hard hit during the recession, such as real estate and financial services. Some never thought they would need resources like WorkSource, according to Starr.

"We're getting a lot of highly skilled people who are coming to the workshops and saying, 'I've never had trouble finding a job,' or 'I've never been on unemployment,' and they're finding it overwhelming," said Starr.

Responding to increased interest, WorkSource created more intensive classes, such as the Fast Track Job Search class, a five-hour session that focuses on networking opportunities. A two-hour Career Mapping course helps job-seekers discover transferable skills.

Ann Franken, 60, is one of those looking to apply her skills in a new field.

After working as a nursing assistant for more than 20 years, health reasons forced Franken to look for work that is less physically demanding. She sent out more than 100 resumes but has received little word back and has been unemployed for a year.

Like others, Franken takes multiple WorkSource classes. She attends the resume lab periodically and frequents the basic computer skills class.

If nothing else, the resources can infuse a sense of direction into job seekers, said Wilhelm. "People come out a little bit more clear on what their goal is. I feel like they're hopeful."

Nicole Dungca: 503-294-5919; nicoledungca@news.oregonian.com

WorkSource Clackamas

What is it? A government-funded network of services from local organizations, aimed at helping laid-off workers and the businesses that can hire them. The program's offerings include one-on-one consultations, workshops at Clackamas Community College and referrals to other training resources.

Where is it? 506 High Street, Oregon City, with an additional office at Clackamas Community College, 19600 Molalla Ave., Oregon City.

More information: 971-673-6400; www.worksourceclackamas.org