

Job fair helps link applicants, firms

Driadonna Roland • Staff Writer • January 19, 2011

Andrew Christensen, 22, hasn't seen many job offers since graduating from the University at Albany last spring with a degree in psychology and business.

"It's been pretty difficult," said the Marion, Wayne County, resident. "There's been a lot of applications filled out, a lot of phone calls made with no calls back."

Hoping to change his employment status, Christensen attended the Greater Rochester Career Conference & Job Fair on Tuesday at Monroe Community College, which provided career services and employers looking to hire.

More than 800 job seekers registered for the event, which brought out companies such as Xerox Corp., Verizon Wireless and Excellus BlueCross BlueShield. Also, several training workshops were held throughout the day and community agencies such as the Housing Council were on hand to share information about the services they provide.

"The job seeker is our customer, and we want our customer to be satisfied," said Christina Bakewicz, business services manager with RochesterWorks, which hosted the fair along with the state Department of Labor, MCC and WHEC-TV (Channel 10).

The fair couldn't have come at a better time for some. The regional unemployment rate stands at 7.7 percent, the highest it has been since summer, though it remains below the statewide and nationwide rates of 8.3 percent and 9.4 percent, respectively. New state and regional figures are due out later this week.

The job fair also brought exposure to companies that might have more to offer than people might assume. For example, ABVI Goodwill, which may be better known for its retail operations, was hiring for positions in finance, call center work and network administration. "We're growing by leaps and bounds," said Natalie Washington, a talent specialist at ABVI Goodwill.

Companies were required to submit job postings in advance to RochesterWorks so the agency could confirm that companies, in fact, had openings for the fair, Bakewicz said.

And despite the tough job market, Christensen said he was encouraged by representatives from Paychex Inc. and Optimax Systems Inc. looking to hire and not simply to share company information. "It's not just what's in the area, it's what's available right now," Christensen said. "I don't know about anybody else, but that's more important than what could be."

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University of Albany graduates Ashley Rieflin and Andrew Christensen, both of Marion, attend the Rochester Career Conference & Job Fair at Monroe Community College on Tuesday. (JAMIE GERMANO staff photographer)

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