

The Columbus Dispatch

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Help wanted (and offered)

Local groups lend a hand to people looking for work

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By [Tracy Turner](#)

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH



Doral Chenoweth III | Dispatch

Jane Steible, left, Kelly Services staffing manager, speaks with Kathy Connett, who's searching for a job.



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Gahanna resident Jeff Kreinbrink fills out an application for a warehouse position at a job fair. The fair, held Wednesday at Rickenbacker Airport, attracted more than 600 job seekers.

"If someone had told me I would be without a job for almost a year, I wouldn't have believed it."

Kathy Connett

who lost her job after more than 20 years at the same company

Kathy Connett navigated the job fair with the skill of someone who's been there before.

Five times before, to be exact.

In the 11 months she's been unemployed, Connett has diligently gone to job fair after job fair with a professional resume in hand, looking to land a position similar to the one she held before being laid off.

After working as an accountant for more than 20 years for North American Life Insurance (previously Midland Mutual Insurance), Connett lost her job in September after the company moved its offices to South Dakota.

The Gahanna resident said she felt as if "the rug was pulled out from under me."

"I had no intention to leave the company. I planned to work there until retirement," Connett said. "If someone had told me I would be without a job for almost a year, I wouldn't have believed it.

"I'm trying to get a job but never thought it would be this long or hard."

Connett isn't alone in her sentiments.

Central Ohio nonprofit agencies that offer employment-related services are reporting increases in the number of clients looking to receive help finding work -- and many find the road to be difficult.

Jewish Family Services, which, along with several other agencies, organized a job fair this week at Rickenbacker Airport, said it has had an increase in the number of people using its career and work-force development services. The agency cannot say how much of an increase until the end of the year.

More than 600 people attended Wednesday's job fair, said Lynn Aspey, director of business relations at the nonprofit agency. A total of 62 companies took part, including Kroger, FedEx, Central Ohio Transit Authority, UPS, Cheryl & Co. and Gap Inc. Direct.

More than 1,300 people took part in a job fair the agency held in the spring.

That's not surprising considering that Ohio's unemployment rate rose to 7.2 percent last month, the highest level since 1992, according to the state. The rate is up 0.6 percentage point since June and 1.6 percentage points in the past 12 months.

About 11,600 jobs were lost in July, dropping the state job total to about 5.4 million.

That compares with national figures that show employers cut more than 100,000 jobs last month, with a total job loss this year of about 580,000 jobs through July, said John Challenger, president of Challenger, Gray & Christmas Inc., a global outplacement-consulting firm based in Chicago.

And the cuts aren't nearly over yet, he said.

"Considering that layoffs traditionally rise in the last four months of the year, and with uncharacteristically high job cuts over the summer months, the total job loss for the year is likely to surpass 1 million for the first time since 2005," Challenger said.

As a result, agencies such as Jewish Family Services are putting their jobs programs into high gear. Its Success program, for example, offers free job-search support, career counseling, computer training, cover-letter and professional resume writing, interview coaching and job referrals.

Bill Jones sought the agency's help after he lost his job in October after 30 years in retail-loss prevention. He said the agency's help with resume and cover-letter writing, as well as its weekly job support and networking meetings, have been beneficial.

"A lot of people go through this, but it's still an emotional roller coaster," the Westerville resident said.

"You can't give up hope; you've got to keep trying."

The organization has 12 career counselors on staff who can meet individually with clients and helped 375 people find work in the past 12 months, it said. The average wage is \$15.81 per hour.

"We're able to tell people what businesses are looking for in a tight economy," said Lora Fish, a career consultant there. "That's what people say helps them the most."

New Directions Career Center has experienced an increase of 30 percent compared with last year in the number of people looking for help to find jobs, said Cindy Kazalia, a placement specialist at the agency.

"The face of who we serve has changed based on the economy," she said. "The level of professionalism and education from the people that we're seeing is much more diverse now, from entry level to management level."

The nonprofit agency offers free classes on career planning, resume writing, job searches, interviewing skills, salary negotiations and financial literacy workshops.

Clients also can meet one-on-one with career-placement specialists to individualize their job-search needs, said Ellen P. Barney, the agency's executive director.

The agency has helped 200 clients land a job this year, she said.

"People are expressing much more urgency to find jobs now, especially with the ongoing mortgage crisis," Barney said. "More people are expressing fear and saying they don't know where to turn next."

"That's the critical issue: Yes, you can get unemployment, but people also need to know how to get that next job, and we are here to help."

Some of the biggest mistakes people make in their job hunt is applying for jobs they aren't qualified for, not following up after an interview and mailing hard copies of

resumes and cover letters when such information has been requested via online submission, she said.

"Most times, those mailed resumes get ignored," Barney said.

Despite the length of her job search, Connett is confident that she'll land a job soon with the help she's gotten from Jewish Family Services.

"I know if I continue this, I will get a job. I'm just not sure how long it will take," she said. "I have so much to offer, not just professionally but from life experience."

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