EMPLOYMENT

Employers recruiting to fill 650 openings

Success stories: How a survival job led to a fatter paycheck

By Jondi Gumz
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SANTA CRUZ » Lance Vera has been homeless twice and unemployed three times.

During the downturn, the University of Cincinnati honors graduate became president of Santa Cruz Profile, the networking group for job-seeking professionals, and took a “survival job” at CineLux Theatres. That helped him step into a temp position at UC Santa Cruz funded by Proposition 30, temporary taxes to fund education passed in 2012, which led to his current job on campus as an assistant accountant.

“I was able to rejoin the middle class,” he said.

He’s not the only one.

He said he knows of five people scraping by in survival jobs who came to the job fair last fall presented by the nonprofit Access2Employment and got a job in their field paying more.

For the first time, Access2Employment will put on a spring job fair March 25 at the Coconut Grove.

The 650 openings are more than double the 300 jobs at the Feb. 24 Workforce Santa Cruz County job fair which attracted more than 300 job seekers.

Vera said organizers will use openings as a metric to evaluate the job fairs.

Previously Access2Employment scheduled job fairs in October in connection with Disability Awareness Month. Last year, 40 employers participated.

However employers indicated more hiring takes place in spring, which is reflected in county unemployment figures 7.1 percent in May vs. 10.2 percent in January.

Organizers took that feedback to heart.

“This is kind of an experiment for us,” Vera said, noting that some employers are interested in hiring high school seniors and college students and filling seasonal jobs. “We’re still going for white-collar professionals but this is a new thing for us focusing on youth employers.”

Job volunteer Deb Leck has reached out to the county Office of Education to make high school counselors and their students aware of the job fair.

Gulf Coast Enterprises, which has 200 openings nationwide including seven IT positions in Sea- side, is flying in two recruiters from Atlanta.

“They do work with disabled vets,” Vera said.

Recruiter Tom Jones will speak at 2:30 p.m. to employers and agencies advising them, “Don’t Hire People You Like” and Sharon Theocharides of Goodwill’s Shoreline Workforce Development will tell job seekers how to “Craft a 30-Second Elevator Pitch” at 5:30 p.m.

Resume critiquing will be 4-6:30 p.m.

The job fair will run from 4-7:30 p.m., later than usual, to enable people who have jobs to attend. That’s another change based on survey feedback.

“I hope people who have jobs will get a new job and free up their old spot for someone else,” Vera said.

“That would be a nice ripple effect.”

JOB FAIR
What: Access2Employment job fair
When: 4-7:30 p.m. March 25
Where: Coconut Grove, 400 Beach St., Santa Cruz
Participating: American Solar Direct, Bay Federal Credit Union, Cabrillo College, Central California Alliance for Health, CineLux Theatres, City of Santa Cruz, County of Santa Cruz, Gulf Coast Enterprises, KSBW-TV, Kelly Services, Manpower, Michael’s Transportation Service, Modern Woodmen of America, Monterey Bay Aquarium, Monterey Mushrooms, Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District, Santa Cruz Seaside Co., Santa Cruz Staffing, The Armada Group, Threshold Enterprises, UC Santa Cruz, Victorian Home Care, Visiting Angels, WORLDPAC, WarpHire.
Cost: $150 for employers, deadline Friday; free to job seekers
Details: www.access2employment.com