

Job centers booming as more layoffs occur

ECONOMY, From 1B

casualties suddenly clamoring for help.

In Washington County, one facility has recorded a 22% increase in requests for help updating résumés, polishing job-interview skills and scouring the landscape for job vacancies.

Another center in Waukesha County has seen a 26% increase in clients seeking the same kind of help.

And in Racine County, the number of people attending group workshops for job-search strategies has jumped 64% since last year.

"It's huge," said Debbie Jossart, manager of the Racine County Workforce Development Center.

"We've been hit with some very significant layoffs," she said.

As the economy has headed south, so has financial support for Wisconsin's one-stop centers. The federal grant ran out after three years, and the centers have been forced to become more self-reliant.

Funding seen as inadequate

"We do recognize that there are financial needs at the centers," said Chris Marshman, a spokesman for the state Department of Workforce Development. "But these are tight financial times."

The workforce development department has been providing operating support for the centers, and other funding comes from other state agencies that set up shop and work alongside the job counselors.

But state funding is growing ever tighter, as the state sinks into a budget crisis that has Gov. Scott McCallum predicting a deficit that could top \$1.3 billion.

FOR INFORMATION

For more information about **Wisconsin job centers**, visit the Department of Workforce Development at www.dwd.state.wi.us or call (888) 258-9966.

Prust said he fears some of the job centers will find they are ill-equipped to handle the demands of the new recession.

"They're going to be tight in terms of funding," he said. Referring to state and federal agencies, he added: "They mandated that we create these, but then they didn't really fund them."

Some centers have shifted resources around to cope with the growing needs of a growing population.

At the Waukesha County center, for example, more employees were assigned to help job-seekers with their résumés in response to a surge in demand for that sort of service.

Workload is 'wild,' 'crazy'

Barb Suyama, manager of the Career Center at the Waukesha outlet, said she received 238 requests for résumé assistance in October alone — more than five times the number of requests she received in October last year.

"It just got wild and crazy," she said.

Overall, the Waukesha County Workforce Development Center has seen 5,219 clients through November, compared with 4,132 in all of last year.

Clients increasingly are older and white-collar, people who are in the job market for the first time in many years having lost jobs that they thought were secure and stable.

"They seem desperate, to be honest with you," Suyama said.

At the Ozaukee County Workforce Development Center near Cedarburg, officials have helped 7,954 people this year, up from 7,395 last year, while the Washington County Workforce Development Center has seen a more dramatic jump — from 6,671 to 8,142.

Susan Hackbarth, manager of Ozaukee and Washington counties' facilities, can rattle off a list of recent layoffs by area companies: International Paper, Maysteel Corp., Amcast Automotive and more.

Middle managers also affected

Hackbarth said the layoffs are affecting not only factory workers, but middle managers, too.

"With the economic downturn, we are seeing a lot more activity," she said.

At the Racine County center, the number of people attending job-search workshops has climbed from 2,904 last year to 4,766 so far this year — an increase of 64%. The number of people inquiring about job openings has increased from 29,939 to 38,082, officials said.

Mark Mundl, strategic coordinator at the Racine center, said many clients are so unaccustomed to seeking assistance in the job market that they walk into the facility expecting to leave with new jobs.

Many, he added, appear "shell-shocked" from their layoffs.

The hard times represent an equally unfamiliar situation for workers at the one-stop center.

"It's a very challenging time," Mundl said of work at the center. "The last time we had a recession, we didn't exist."