

Working it



Dustin Hannah, a senior from Vanguard High School, and Joshua Dicapua, a graduate from Marion Technical Institute, prepare to attend the Youth Job Fair sponsored by the CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion on Wednesday at the College of Central Florida Klein Center. A total of 141 seniors were registered for the event, and organizers were expecting a total of 306 students for the job fair. There were 35 employers on site, including the U.S. Army, Marion County Public Schools and Lockheed Martin.



Trinity Acevedo, left, a Dunnellon High School senior and a College of Central Florida student, fills out a job application while Taryana Cobb, right, a senior from Vanguard High School, was looks over a brochure from a potential employer. [STAFF PHOTOS BY DOUG ENGLE]

Employers, young job seekers meet at CLM job fair

By Joe Callahan
Staff writer

Only five businesses attended a local youth job expo in June 2014. At that event, more than 350 young adults dressed in suits and dresses waited in long lines in the summer heat in hopes of landing a job.

The Marion County unemployment rate was 7.3 percent back then, and there were more than 9,500 local residents who were unemployed in a job market that was still sputtering during the lengthy recession. Businesses were

not expanding and available jobs were few and far between.

On Wednesday, it was clear that an improved economy had flipped the tables. It was the fifth annual CareerSource CLM (Citrus Levy Marion) youth job fair. This year's event was held in partnership with the local school district.

The free event was exclusively for teens and young adults, ages 16 to 24, who were seeking full- or part-time employment for permanent, summer or temporary positions. A record 35 businesses attended in hopes of hiring

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one of the 300 young people who arrived to find employment.

This time, instead of long lines in the heat, these dapper students (mostly seniors about to graduate high school) waited in line inside the College of Central Florida lobby. One by one, each student filed into the CF Klein Conference Center to interview for jobs. This year the available jobs has expanded far beyond the traditional fast-food and service markets.

Among the businesses seeking employees were Lockheed Martin, R+L Global Logistics, Signature Brands, ClosetMaid, Marion County government and the Marion County Sheriff's Office, just to name some of the larger ones.

In March, the area unemployment rate was 4.6 percent and there were only 6,178 people unemployed. There are 8,205 more people working today than there were in 2014. As a result, it is now a worker's market.

"Our first youth job fair in 2014 had five businesses, in 2015 there were seven, and nine in 2016," said Laura Byrnes, the local CareerSource's communications manager. "Last year we had 16 employers; this year's event more than doubles that."

Brenda Chrisman, a career center and business services officer for CareerSource CLM, said the job fair has traditionally been held in June. It was bumped up a month so that high school seniors could take advantage of the opportunity before graduating. Many seniors have completed, or are working on, soft skills curriculum to help prepare them for the workplace.

Additionally, Chrisman said, the variety and number of businesses who participated was "phenomenal."

"Once again, this is an extraordinary opportunity for older youth and young adults as well as those businesses interested in hiring this age group," Chrisman said in a statement.

Byrnes credited the success of this year's job fair to better coordination with the school district and an enthusiastic CareerSource staff who fanned out into the community to meet with businesses.

Byrnes said the school district has been teaching soft skills to students. The district also surveyed the students to find the job areas they were seeking. That meant CareerSource officials could target employers to match the student interests.

Representatives from Marion Technical College were also on hand to showcase their post-secondary programs.

Mark Vianello, the school district's executive director of career and technical education, said that in the past, youth job expos were aimed at just seniors. This year it was opened to a range of students and young adults. Vianello also said the business community is also seeing the district's work in expanding vocational programs and teaching soft skills, both important programs that means better employees for businesses.

One of the businesses at the event was Squishy Face Studio, a pet toy and training tool manufacturer based in Citra. The company is owned by Justin and Jessica Lohmann. The company launched in 2011 in the couple's garage, and now they have contracts with Amazon.com and Chewy.com. They have an office in Citra and are

ready to hire a part-time employee to assemble products.

"We used to hire based on personal recommendations," Justin Lohmann said. "But now we need find employees with specific skill sets for the job."

Andrea Ochoa, 18, will be graduating from West Port High School next week. Ochoa said she is planning to attend CF in the fall and one day hopes to become a dental assistant.

"I would like to get a full-time job over the summer and maybe part-time once I start CF," she said.

Kevin Hernandez, 18, who graduated from Vanguard High School, will also attend CF in fall and hopes to be a commuter engineer.

"I came because this is a land of opportunity," Hernandez said. "They want to hire people, and I am here to help the world."

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OBITUARIES

Death Notices



SAMS, JR., JAMES EARL
 Jacksonville - James Earl Sams, Jr., 68, professional lawn maintenance, passed May 9, 2018. Seller's Funeral Home.

Funeral Notices



BUECHER, ARTHUR E.
 Ocala - Arthur E. Buecher passed away quietly in his