

Virtual career fair allows job seekers to attend from home

By **Joe Callahan**
Staff writer

A decade ago, during a long national recession, many workers had to take jobs outside of their trained professions to keep a roof over their heads and food on their tables. Today, with the nation's unemployment rate at a 50-year low, many of those same workers are still in jobs outside of their trained skill sets.

These workers now find themselves wondering if there are job opportunities in their trained field or whether it's time to explore other options.

But the real issue in today's fast-paced world is finding time to travel to job and career fairs around the region.

Many workers would lose money if they took time off from work to attend a traditional job fair to upgrade employment or a career fair to explore new professions. In addition, it costs money (gas, motel and new wardrobe) when traveling to meet these company officials. And companies, many of which have strict budgets to protect the bottom line, are also strapped for time needed to spend with potential workers.

And despite lost income or productivity, coupled with the expense of traveling, there are still no guarantees the employers and the job seeker

will even be a match.

To better align employers and job seekers in today's digital age, Rasmussen College will hold a free virtual career fair on Monday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The event is for anyone wanting to click on their computer and explore new career opportunities. Virtual means the entire event will be held online in a portal at Rasmussen.vfairs.com.

Geared toward Rasmussen students and alumni, officials said that anyone around the globe can log on and explore job opportunities with 74 employers from around the country as well as learn about careers offered by Rasmussen.

Serious job seekers should upload resumes and other material before the event. However, anyone can log on anytime during the event to explore the action.

Melissa Wagner, a Rasmussen College career services manager based in Minnesota, said attendees can log in to attend webinars about creating resumes and sessions on interview techniques.

Wagner said virtual career fairs are a new trend nationwide and noted that such fairs offer flexibility to anyone wanting to learn about job opportunities and careers in today's ever-changing workforce. She also said virtual fairs are not limited to the

local or regional workforce as they are oftentimes national, or even international, events.

Rasmussen College is a regionally accredited private college with campuses in many cities, including Ocala, in six states. Wagner noted that the free virtual career fair is perfect for an employer, an employee or a student, who are all typically too busy to attend such events in person.

Participants register and can login and logout to the digital platform anytime, from anywhere. Officials said attendees can upload their resume, as well as learn about employers and other job opportunities. Attendees can also chat with employers, attend webinars and apply for positions.

Those who attend the fair can revisit and communicate with employers for up to 30 days after the live event.

"It gives employers and the job seeker much more flexibility," Wagner noted.

Laura Byrnes, communications manager for CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion, said the agency has taken a hybrid virtual/in-person approach to job and career fairs for several years. CareerSource has an online resource tool for applicants and employers. Applicants often submit resumes and applications online before in-person industry-specific job fairs.

"An in-person (fair) is great," Byrnes said. "At the same time, we encourage (job seekers) to submit their resumes online."

Byrnes said since the economy started improving a few years ago, CareerSource began holding several industry specific in-person fairs, as opposed as one for all professions.

For example, CareerSource will hold a live "Manufacturing and Logistics Career Fair" from 3:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesday at the College of Central Florida's Webber Center, 3001 SW College Road, in Ocala.

It will be held in partnership with the Mid-FL Regional Manufacturers Association (MRMA) and the Florida Advanced Technological Education Center (FLATE).

"You might not have hundreds of people to show up, but those who do are trained and have the experience," Byrnes said.

Many of the region's top manufacturing and logistics companies will be in attendance at the in-person event on Wednesday. This career fair caps off National Manufacturing Month. In Florida, there are more than 18,000 companies and 800,000 individuals working in manufacturing and logistics.

"I know other CareerSource

regions have had them (virtual only fairs)," Byrnes said.

According to FlexJobs.com, there are seven main reasons why companies should take part in a virtual job and career fairs:

- Employers can interact with potential employees from all over the world.

- Virtual fairs save money because the company now has a cyberspace booth. Companies spend money on costly displays or cover recruiter travel costs.

- The fairs are heavily advertised by sponsors, thus eliminating the cost to promote the event.

- Employers can better dictate a clear company message when it is stated online and not relayed in-person by different employees.

- Virtual fairs allow employees to use their work and personal time more effectively.

- Virtual fairs let employers communicate the way today's generation communicates online through messaging apps.

- Because the event is online, employers can capture potential employee contact information easier, thus making follow-up interviews much easier.

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PARNAS

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Amid a relentless quest for upward mobility, Parnas left behind a trail of unpaid bills and a long list of legal disputes.



Parnas, a 47-year-old native of Soviet-era Ukraine, and his business partner, David Correia, 44, of West Palm Beach, are among four men facing federal charges of conspiracy and lying to the Federal Election Commission about political donations.

Parnas' ties to the Ukrainian government and to Rudy Giuliani, the former New York mayor who's the personal attorney to President Donald Trump, has vaulted the case into the headlines. Parnas' plea of not guilty, entered in federal court Wednesday along with that of his South Florida partner Igor Fruman, received intense media coverage.

While news stories often refer to Parnas as a "Florida businessman," it's unclear if Parnas ever enjoyed financial success here. Several of his commercial endeavors while he lived in Boca ended in flops.

A decade ago, Parnas moved to Palm Beach County from Miami-Dade County. He arrived as a man of decidedly middle-market means.

In June 2009, Parnas signed a \$1,425-a-month lease on an apartment in Boca Raton. The next month, a state trooper cited Parnas for driving without a seatbelt. Parnas was behind the wheel of a 10-year-old Honda, according to the traffic citation.

Parnas struggled to make the rent. Four times in 2010, the owner of the Mizner Green apartments sued Parnas for not paying.

Still, when a Boca Raton police officer pulled him over in mid-2010, Parnas had upgraded to a Mercedes.

Solvency issues aside, Parnas had big dreams.

In December 2010, Parnas and Correia agreed to invest \$500,000 in a movie, "Anatomy of an Assassin," being produced by a California company. Plot elements included child prostitution and a protagonist coping with Alzheimer's disease. One investor testified in federal court that Parnas told him film legend Jack Nicholson had signed on to play the aging killer.

Parnas and Correia didn't have \$500,000, so they turned to Michael Pues, a

semi-employed layer of concrete tile from Long Beach, N.Y..

Parnas knew Pues through a precious metals firm Parnas worked for. Pues was the executor of a trust established by his late father, and when Pues called the firm to complain about hefty trading fees on palladium and other commodities, they told him Parnas would fix things.

For a time, Parnas seemed true to his word. The exorbitant commissions stopped, and Pues came to trust the Ukrainian emigré. When Pues visited Boca, he played golf with Parnas and Correia, and they pitched him on a penny stock. Pues was impressed to see Parnas tooling around Boca in a Bentley.

In late 2010, Parnas came to New York and made his pitch. Parnas told Pues he could make \$3 million on the movie deal. Pues was enthralled. After a construction accident, he hadn't been working.

"I have three kids getting ready for college," Pues said during a federal trial. "I'll finally have money rather than scraping by."

Parnas persuaded Pues to put \$100,000 into the film project. A few months later, Parnas was still \$400,000 short, and he hit up the Pues family for a \$350,000 bridge loan meant to save the movie deal, according to Pues' federal suit.

The Pues family expected to get its principal back in a matter of weeks, but the money never materialized.

"Once again I find myself in the awkward position of needing to email you regarding your not keeping your word," Pues wrote to Parnas in a 2011 note the family included in a lawsuit.

The Pues family faced tax penalties of \$161,000 for taking money out of an Individual Retirement Account to loan to Parnas.

In a federal suit in 2011, Pues accused Parnas of stealing their money. In 2016, after a three-day trial in federal court, the family trust won a \$510,000 judgment against Parnas.

New homes, evictions

Meanwhile, in April 2011, Parnas moved into a house more befitting a movie mogul. He and his wife, Svetlana, signed an \$8,500-a-month lease on a place in west Boca.

Within a few months, the landlord filed an eviction suit, saying Parnas hadn't paid the rent.

In 2012, Parnas upgraded his living conditions again. He signed a \$14,000-a-month lease on a house in Boca Raton.

On five occasions in 2012, 2013 and 2014, the landlord,

Jerry Fernandez, sued Parnas for eviction. Fernandez, reached by phone this week, declined to comment.

Parnas proved no more reliable in paying rent for office space. In 2013, FraudGuarantee.com, a company run by Parnas and Correia, signed a lease for a 2,358-square-foot office at 7700 Congress Ave. in Boca. In early 2015, the landlord sued for unpaid rent.

FraudGuarantee's website says the company moved to a different address in Boca. The organization promises to "reduce the risk of fraud as well as mitigate the damage caused by fraudulent acts."

The company has a link to Giuliani, who told Reuters that FraudGuarantee.com paid Giuliani Partners \$500,000 in August 2018. Giuliani said he was hired to consult on FraudGuarantee's technologies and provide legal advice on regulatory issues.

Hudson Holdings

In September 2016, Parnas and Correia seemed to have found a sweet gig. The two landed jobs with Hudson Holdings, the Delray Beach real estate developer, according to court filings.

Parnas and Correia were in charge of securing financing for a Hudson Holdings proposed project in St. Louis.

Parnas and Correia got a 50 percent stake in the development. Hudson Holdings also promised the pair salaries of \$15,000 to \$20,000 a month and Cadillac Escalades.

Hudson Holdings agreed to reimburse Parnas for \$180,000 in unspecified expenses he had already taken on as he pitched the deal to backers. And Parnas would get health insurance and a personal assistant.

According to a lawsuit they later filed, Parnas and Correia were effective fundraisers. They quickly brought in \$200,000.

By January 2017, Parnas and Correia reeled in a \$10 million loan for the project. Parnas ran up an additional \$250,000 in unspecified expenses that month, according to court papers.

However, when Hudson Holdings bought the St. Louis parcel, Parnas and Correia allege, the developer shut them out. Hudson Holdings stopped paying the pair, ended the leases on their Escalades and canceled Parnas' health insurance just as Svetlana needed medical treatment.

In June 2017, the pair sued Hudson Holdings, claiming fraud and breach of contract. The case has dragged on since then. A June 2019 mediation

session in Boca Raton ended in stalemate.

Ballard Partners

Parnas continued to work the angles. Bank records, documents obtained in the Pues lawsuit and interviews with people who have done business with Parnas show that his finances weren't always a flop.

Ballard Partners, one of the most powerful lobbying firms in Florida, paid Parnas at least \$45,000 in 2018, documents show.

A source familiar with the transaction, who requested anonymity so as not to be connected to Parnas' legal troubles, said the firm paid Parnas because he recommended Ballard to a potential client who ended up hiring Ballard.

Brian Ballard, the company's chief, is a titan in the lobbying world, representing corporate giants such as 3M, Amazon, FPL, Walgreens, U.S. Sugar and Honda as well as sports entities like the National Basketball Association, the New York Yankees and the Tampa Bay Lightning.

Ballard chaired Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' inaugural committee and was a major Florida fundraiser for Donald Trump's 2016 campaign.

The source said none of those clients have raised concerns about Ballard's connection to Parnas.

Those clients, the source said, understand Ballard's payments to Parnas amounted to "a one-off situation."

\$30,000 loan

A year before getting paid by Ballard, a company connected to Parnas, Aaron Investments I LLC, got a \$30,000 payment, bank records show.

A source familiar with that transaction, who also requested anonymity so as not to be connected to Parnas' legal woes, said that \$30,000 was a loan Parnas got from a man who worked at a Miami-area restaurant.

It's not clear why Parnas needed the loan, the source said.

When the man agreed to lend Parnas the \$30,000, Parnas asked that it be made to Aaron Investments and not to him personally because "his other accounts were arrested."

The source said Parnas repaid the loan a few months later.

At first, Parnas attempted to repay the loan by offering his Rolex watch, but the man declined because he did not believe the watch would cover the \$30,000 debt.

The source said Parnas eventually offered up another piece of jewelry, which the man accepted and sold for \$31,000.

\$1 million payment

As federal investigators move forward with their case against Parnas, his finances are sure to come under scrutiny.

One especially large transaction, made on May 15, 2018, saw the Jacobs Law Group, an Aventura firm owned by Russell S. Jacobs, make a \$1.26 million payment to Aaron Investments.

Jacobs has not returned multiple calls seeking comment about that transaction.

The Parnas indictment does not reference the Jacobs payment, but two days after it was made, bank records show Aaron Investments made a \$325,000 payment to America First Action, a political committee that supports President Trump.

Campaign finance records show that \$325,000 donation as having come from Global Energy Producers, which federal investigators say was a company set up by Parnas and Fruman as a way of funneling foreign money to political candidates.

In July 2018, Parnas and Fruman, of Sunny Isles Beach, traveled to Israel as part of a group of supporters of Trump. Former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee and former White House communications director Anthony Scaramucci were part of the delegation.

Scaramucci, a prominent figure in the hedge-fund world and a supporter of Giuliani's mayoral bids, said Parnas attempted to ingratiate himself by repeatedly mentioning Giuliani.

"Lev is a master at that," Scaramucci said. "He wanted my cellphone number. I definitely gave it to him."

Parnas took pains to portray himself as politically connected. He attended the 2018 funeral of the late George H.W. Bush, and Parnas has appeared in photos with Giuliani, Trump, Scaramucci and DeSantis.

"Lev has a tendency to stick his head in a lot of pictures," Scaramucci said.

By this year, Parnas knew the feds were pursuing charges against him. When he and Fruman were arrested Oct. 9 at an airport outside of Washington, D.C., they were holding one-way tickets to Germany.

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