

Laura Byrnes
CAREER
SOURCE

Thankful to offer help

As work waivers end, CareerSource on the job

In less than two short weeks, waivers intended to make it easier for those filing claims for Reemployment Assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic are scheduled to end.

Formerly known as unemployment compensation, Reemployment Assistance provides temporary wage replacement benefits to qualified individuals who are out of work through no fault of their own. RA is run by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity

You may recall, perhaps painfully so, that the program encountered more than its share of glitches last spring as businesses were forced to cut back or shutter and staff were furloughed or laid off.

From March through May, the RA system was deluged by Covid-19 related claims — 1.7 million claimants filed for assistance representing 63.5% of the total 2.6 million claimants through Nov. 7.

Regionwide, 44,138 individuals or 22% of the labor force filed claims including 11,464 in Citrus County, which represented 24.2% of the labor force.

Of those, 7,400 claimants here or 64.5% of the reported total, filed in the first three months of the pandemic. That parallels what was happening statewide, with 1.7 million individuals, or 63.5% of the total number of claimants, filing during that initial period.

Suffice to say, the system was swamped.

Early on, Gov. Ron De-Santis lifted work registration and job search requirements ordinarily required to claim weeks. Those waivers, which took effect March 15, were originally set to end in September but were extended through Dec. 5.

And now that date is fast approaching.

What does this mean if you or someone you know plans to file for, or continue claiming, benefits after the waivers end?

First, it's important to underscore that work registration and job search requirements are nothing new.

They had been in place for more than a decade prior to March 15.

Second, while Career-Source CLM does not run the RA program, we can play a critical role in helping claimants fulfill requirements to obtain benefits.

Specifically, our staff can work one-on-one with you to:

start the work registration process by registering with Employ Florida,

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Season unlike others



Associated Press

Shoppers walk past a display of Christmas decorations at a Target store, Sunday, Nov. 8, 2020, in Marlborough, Mass. Thanksgiving is Thursday and more national chains will be closed than in recent years.

2020 pandemic changes look of holiday shopping locally, nationwide

MICHAEL D. BATES
Staff writer

here is little doubt the COVID-19 pandemic will change the way people experience the holidays this year.

Thanksgiving is Thursday and more national chains will be closed than in recent years. In Citrus County, the closings include Bealls, Home Depot, Lowe's, Ollie's Bargain Outlet, Publix

and Walmart.

Josh Wooten, president/CEO of the Citrus County Chamber of Commerce, said he knows online shopping will be more attractive to some this year due to COVID-19 but hopes shoppers check with local retailers and see if there are

online options.

"We also encourage buying gift cards from local businesses," Wooten said.

"Wearing a mask and social distancing can slow the spread. If you take precautions, shopping our local businesses can be safely done."

People can still support the local economy by having a friend or relative shop for them, he added.

"Many of our local businesses make a large percentage of their profits over the holidays," Wooten said. "They in turn pay taxes, donate to charities and employ our friends and neighbors. Consider all of that as you map out your strategy for shopping this year."

A different look

Walmart says it will spread out its traditional one-day Black Friday deals over three weekends in November in an effort to reduce crowds in its stores during a pandemic.

The nation's largest retailer said

more of its doorbuster deals will be reserved for online, as a way to steer more shoppers away from its stores.

With the coronavirus still spreading, stores have had to rethink their usual holiday plans. Thanksgiving Day doorbusters are canceled. There will still be in-store sales the day after Thanksgiving, but companies are expected to try to steer many shoppers to their websites to avoid crowds and chaos.

"We're preparing for a holiday season unlike any we've seen before," said Target CEO Brian Cornell.

An earlier start

One thing that hasn't changed is shoppers' preference to shop earlier than ever. It used to be the Friday after Thanksgiving, normally called Black Friday, kicked off the Thursday normally kicks off the busy holiday shopping season.

But more than 40% of holiday shoppers say they started earlier than they normally do, according to a National Retail Federation (NRF) and Prosper Insights & Analytics survey.

"Retailers have demonstrated their commitment and ability to ensure safe shopping environments for their customers and their associates," said NRF President and CEO Matthew Shay.

As of early November, 59% of holiday shoppers said in a survey they had already started making purchases, a 21% increase from a decade ago.

Even so, there is still plenty of shopping left to do. On average, holiday shoppers say they have completed only 26% of their shopping so far.

Retailers' top priority is the health and safety of their employees and customers, and it seems these investments are paying off. A large majority (70%) of holiday shoppers say that, given the precautions retailers have taken for COVID-19, they have felt safe shopping in stores this holiday season, according to the NRF.

"Consumers have welcomed the longer shopping season, where many retailers have chosen to offer deals before and leading up to the traditional Thanksgiving and Black Friday doorbusters," said Phil Rist, with Prosper Insights.

What's hot

Clothing and accessories are the most popular gift category, according to 54% of those surveyed by the NRF, followed by gift cards/gift certificates (49%), toys (37%), books and other media (34%) and food/candy (28%).

Similar to last year, consumers plan to purchase between three and four gift cards, for an average spend of \$163 per consumer. Total spending on gift cards is expected to reach \$27.5 billion.

The 2020 top toys for boys and girls include LEGOs and PlayStation. Cars and trucks, Hot Wheels and video games are also popular gifts for boys. Barbie and dolls remain the top toys for girls

Credit cards (42%) remain the top form of payment consumers plan to use this holiday season, followed closely by debit cards (41%). Just 15% of consumers listed cash as a top form of payment during the holidays, the lowest in the survey's history and likely related to the coronavirus.

Half (49%) of shoppers plan to use an alternative form of payment such as PayPal, Apple Pay, Samsung Pay or Venmo.



LIVE UNITED 365 Small Business Circle

Hunter Springs Kayaks is a new member of the LIVE UNITED 365 Small Business Circle of the United Way of Citrus County. Owners Dave and Mellisa Perry are pictured with Meghan Pitzer, United Way CEO. To learn more about the program, call the United Way at 352-795-5483.

Special to the Chronicle

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Gerald Hardy joins American Angus Association

Gerald Hardy of Lecanto is a new member of the American Angus Association, reports Mark McCully, CEO of the national breed organization headquartered in St. Joseph, Missouri.

The American Angus Association, with more than 25,000 active adult and junior members, is the largest beef breed association in the world. Its computerized records include detailed information on more than 19 million registered Angus.

The association records ancestral information and keeps production records and genomic data on individual animals to develop industry-leading selection tools for its members.

The programs and services of the association and its entities — Angus Genetics Inc., Angus Media, Certified Angus Beef LLC and the Angus Foundation — help members advance the

beef cattle business by selecting the best animals for their herds and marketing quality genetics for the beef cattle industry and quality beef for

For more information about Angus cattle and the American Angus Association, visit www.angus.org.

consumers.

Diamond Ridge Health, Rehab Center welcomes new administrator

Diamond Ridge Health and Rehabilitation Center recently welcomed Sherri Spillman.

Spillman was born and raised in the beautiful but chilly state of Illinois. Seeking warmer weather, she moved to Florida in 1994.

Spillman received her bachelor's degree from the University of Florida and then made her way into politics.

Looking for a change, Spillman began working in Citrus County as the Admissions and Marketing Director of

a 120-bed skilled nursing facility and it was there she found her love of caring for people.

She then decided to pursue her passion.

Spillman began working on her administrator's license while working on her Master of Arts degree at Webster



Sherri Spillman new Diamond

administrator at Ridge.

administrator. Unfortunately, there diate openings for administrators in Citrus County at

rehab facility in Alachua County.

were not any immethat time, so she went to a very active, short-term

Feeling the pull to return, Spillman found her way back to Citrus County as an administrator of a smaller local skilled-nursing center.

There, she helped them obtain a 5-star Medicare rating, but Spillman, always up for a challenge, was look-

ing for more. An opportunity arose for the administrator position at Diamond Ridge, and knowing her love for this commu-

nity, she accepted. Spillman is determined to make the 142-bed facility, well known for Citrus County's "Best of the Best" award winner, a 5-star Medicare rated facility.

Under her leadership, it is hopeful she and her team will accomplish this.

Nestled next to the prestigious Black Diamond Golf Community, Diamond Ridge has more than 36 private rehabilitation suites.

The expansive community offers therapy gyms so patients may receive therapy designed to fit their needs and get back to their active and independent lifestyles.

She has raised three successful children and now spends her time at home on her farm.

BYRNES

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- offer guidance in providing five work search contacts per week, and
- help sharpen employability skills and obtain job referrals through fee-free staff-assisted career services.

These are not just hoops you need to jump through to receive limited benefits. These are designed to lead to reemployment — after all, isn't full-time work and a living wage what we're all after?

Our CEO Rusty Skinner explained it best when he said. "The goal, of course, is to help those who are out of work find good, gainful employment; RA benefits are temporary and can never fully replace a paycheck.'

He went on to urge anyone who would like assistance again at no charge — to request it sooner rather than later.

Because, if the waivers end on Dec. 5, and you haven't registered or started your job search, what do you think is going to happen when Monday, Dec. 7 rolls around? That's right; everyone will be clamoring for help.

So please don't wait until the last minute, avoid the rush and begin working with us as soon as possible. While we will be closed Thursday and Friday for Thanksgiving, there is still plenty of time next week and the following to meet with us.

Our Career Center in Lecanto is at 683 S. Adolph Point and is open to the public weekdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Staff are also available from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. to take your calls at 352-249-3278 or at 800-434-JOBS (5627).

Lastly, I would be remiss if I didn't use this opportunity to mention a few reasons Career-Source CLM is thankful during a year that has had its challenges for so many.

First, we are blessed to be working with businesses that understand the value of qualified, skilled talent and our cup runneth over when it comes to the cornucopia of candidates

we've been able to assist. We are likewise grateful for our myriad community partners, too numerous to mention, as well as our dedicated Board of Directors including the following Citrus County members: Immediate Past Chair Rachel M. Riley, Citrus Memorial Health; William Burda, Business Resources of Florida, LLC; Kevin Cunningham, RE/ Max Realty One and a former board chair; Theresa Flick, Key Training Center of Citrus County; Albert Jones, Auto-Zone; Ted Knight, United States Marine Corps League; Mike Melfi, Champs Software, Inc.; Nicole Nash, Brannen Banks; Dr. Mark Paugh, College

of Central Florida: Bruce Register, Citrus County Economic Development; and Debra Stanley, Citrus County School District.

Finally, on behalf of Christine Mestrovich, our Citrus County career center manager, and her crackerjack Lecanto team, as well as our entire staff, I'd like to wish you a very happy and safe Thanksgiving.

Laura Byrnes, communications manager at CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion, is accredited in public relations, a certified public relations counselor and a Florida Certified Workforce Professional. Contact her at 352-291-9559, 800-434-5627, ext. 1234, or lbyrnes@careersourceclm.com.



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