

Oh, what a difference a year makes



One year ago, in this space, I wrote about having to close our doors for in-person services as COVID-19 raged through our region as well as elsewhere.

Writing two months in advance of publication -- as I am now -- I wondered if everything might have returned to normal by the time the issue hit the streets. While that was certainly my fervent hope at the time, we all know it was sadly not the case.

For the next several months, CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion focused on providing all services virtually via our website, Live Chat, email, phone, and videoconferencing. During the earliest days of this uncertain time, we did what was needed, not knowing how long it would last or how bad it would get.

We added streamlined requests for services on our website; doubled and then quadrupled the number of Live Chat agents available to talk to customers in real time; converted workshops from in-person to virtual; offered free, in-demand online training; pushed for approval to help the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity clear up the backlog of unemployment compensation claims; assisted businesses both in downsizing and in staffing up. And that was just for starters.

By early May 2020, we began a controlled re-opening of our career centers. At the time, our focus was on those who lost their jobs due to COVID-19 by assisting with job searches, Welfare Transition and/or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) commonly known as Food Stamps.

At the start, we were open in-person from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., by appointment only, and limited to five customers per hour. At the same time, we shifted to virtual platforms to offer events that normally took place in person. That included hiring events and job fairs, youth career expos and, most recently, our annual State of the Workforce Conference.

Of course, all services, to all job seekers, continued to be available virtually. And in case

you didn't know, all services to businesses and candidates, whether virtual or in person, have been and continue to be available at no charge.

Gradually over the last year, in a measured and safe manner, we've added back hours for in-person services at our centers, eliminated the need for appointments -- though it is still recommended -- and dropped the capacity limits.

While many of our large-crowd events are still virtual for now, the good news is that we have resumed normal services hours at all our career centers, including the Marion County center at 2703 NE 14th St., in Ocala as well as our affiliate Talent Center at the College of Central Florida, also in Ocala. That means we're now open for in-person, face-to-face business every weekday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Dale French, our executive vice president, noted that the revision to our operating hours "comes as a result of growing demand for our services."

It is worth noting that we still offer all our services virtually for those who find it more convenient and/or may be reticent to go in person. As to that second point, you should know that we continue to adhere to CDC guidelines for social distancing and use of PPE, such as face coverings, for staff and customers. Also, all incoming customers will be scanned for fever and only those within the normal range as determined by the CDC/Health Department will be permitted access. Our regimen of deep cleaning also continues at our facilities as well as rotating staff to ensure continuity of services.

With expanded hours, variety of program options, fee-free services, and commitment to customer safety, we pledge to continue to do whatever it takes, for as long as it takes, to meet this region's workforce needs. To find out more, give us a call at CareerSource CLM at 352-840-5700 or 800-434-JOBS, or at the Talent Center at 352-840-5762.

Laura Byrnes, APR, CPRC, communications manager at CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion, is Accredited in Public Relations, a Certified Public Relations Counselor and a Florida Certified Workforce Professional. She would love to hear from you and learn what kind of information you'd like to see each month. Please contact her at (352) 291-9559, (800) 434-5627, ext. 1234 or lbyrnes@careersourceclm.com.

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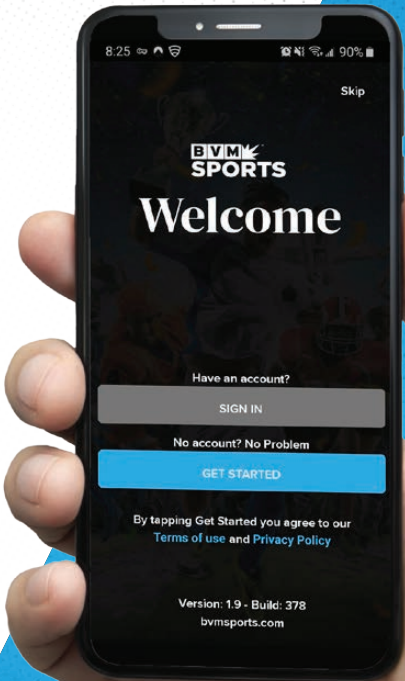
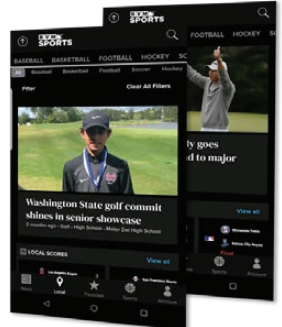
Marion Career Center at 2703 NE 14th St., in Ocala
Talent Center at the College of Central Florida
Both Open Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Call 800-746-7955 or visit careersourceclm.com



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