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Job seekers: Search is difficult but improving

by Pam Haynes
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Sixth in a seven-part series.

HIGH POINT – Job seekers can tell you that the only thing certain about today’s job market is its uncertainty.

Take Brian Frazier of High Point, for example. The 32-year-old landed a manufacturing job with Thomas Built Buses in 2005 and thought it was all he would ever need.

“I was making a decent amount of money, and I was happy there,” Frazier said. “The initial layoff was a real wake-up call for me.”

The High Point-based school bus manufacturer cut about 300 jobs, some temporary and some full time, in the last year and a half when the economy began to dip. Frazier was among the first laid off in November 2008.

“You have a lot of things that flood through your mind at that point,” he said about being laid off the first time. “I have a fiance and three children, and you wonder how you will sustain your livelihood.”

After the layoff, he found that businesses weren’t hiring. If they were, they were only willing to pay minimum wage. With unemployment benefits coming, he decided to enroll in ECPI College of Technology and work part time on the weekends.

“I took it as my chance to focus on my education,” he said.

About 100 employees, including Frazier, were called back earlier this summer, but Frazier said they were warned that the work may not last. So when he was laid off a second time about a week ago, the shock wasn’t as jolting.

“I handled it a lot better because I had been through it before,” he said. “Now I’m going to focus on my education again.”

Acquiring new skills are an important aspect of finding a job, but so is preparing yourself for the reality of the job market, said Steve Vergamini of Greensboro, who attends Triad Job Search Network meetings on Tuesdays at Covenant United Methodist Church in High Point.

“It’s tougher than you think out there,” said Vergamini, a former commercial lender who has been seeking employment for 18 months. “You think you’re ready for it, but you’re not.”

Vergamini said he attends the job search meetings because many job seekers become discouraged if they don’t stay active.

Glenn Wise, facilitator of the group, said the meetings average about 70 people in January but now average 40 people. Some of those people have found jobs, but many of them became discouraged and stopped attending, he said.

“But you can’t sit at home on the computer looking for a job and doing nothing else these days,” Vergamini added. “You just aren’t going to find the job that you’re looking for that way.”

But positive things do seem to be happening on the job front, Vergamini said. He’s noticed more openings since January.

“The year 2009 was virtually leadless for me,” he said. “It’s gotten a lot better. I thought it would take me six months to find a banking job in the Triad. It’s taken much longer, but I feel like I’m getting close to something. I feel like things are finally starting to get better.”

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