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FLAGLER COUNTY JOB FAIR

Flagler County Job Fair attracts big crowd

Hiring event brings potential workers, employers together

By [Aaron London](#)
aaron.london@news-jrn.com

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PALM COAST — Flagler County was hit hard by the Great Recession, including a 44-month stretch of double-digit unemployment that peaked at 15.2 percent in 2009.

On Friday, officials from the county, Flagler County Chamber of Commerce and dozens of local businesses hit back.

The third annual Flagler County Job Fair — put on by the county's Department of Economic Opportunity, the chamber and CareerSource Flagler Volusia — brought job seekers and potential employers together on the Palm Coast campus of Daytona State College.

With more than 210 people preregistered for the event and 47 local companies, all looking to fill open positions, took park. The job fair, which began at noon, was scheduled to run until 6 p.m.

Organizers early Friday afternoon said they expected the turnout to be at least double last year's job fair, which drew 530 people, noting that the number of job seekers who preregistered with nearly twice as many as last year.

"We have the potential for 400 jobs," said Katrina Austin, project manager for the county's economic development department.

Austin said all participating businesses in the job fair were required to have job openings.

"I turned probably 10 businesses away because they didn't meet the criteria," she said.

Austin said advance registration for the event and the number of qualified businesses participating are a good sign for the future of the job fair, which organizers believe is still needed, even though Flagler's unemployment rate has steadily improved in recent years, falling to 5.5 percent, the lowest since 2006.

"It's going to continue to be an annual event," she said.

Local job seeker Didier Diyavanga said he hopes to not need to attend next year's hiring event. The recent immigrant from the Democratic Republic of Congo said he is ready to begin a new life in America with a job.



Attendees at the third annual Flagler County Job Fair sign in before visiting booths from the 47 companies represented at the hiring event. NEWS-JOURNAL/AARON LONDON

He said he is interested in computer network support jobs and went over a list of participating companies before venturing into the classrooms where the booths were set up.

"I'm new to this country," he said. "I need a new job. I hope I get offered a job prospect."

Andrew Arlotta was also looking for a specific job, something in the air conditioning and heating field. While he didn't see a lot of companies in his field, he was optimistic that things will pick up in the job market.

"Building is slowly coming back, so we'll see what happens," he said.

Ted Young, business services manager at CareerSource Flagler Volusia, the regional workforce development board, said even with Flagler County's jobless rate improving, the job fair is an important event.

"There's a lot of slack left in the labor market," he said. "This event provides people a chance to engage with employers who, hopefully, will give them opportunities."

At the National Broadband booth, office manager Becky Gentry was looking to do exactly that.

"We have probably 20 openings," she said. "We want to give people a new career, not just a job."

For Kent Ryan, dean of Daytona State's Palm Coast campus, hosting the event was an easy decision.

"This is our second year," he said. "This is very important for our students as they complete their studies."

This was the first year participating in the job fair for Jim Bowe, president of Arrow Rehabilitation in Palm Coast.

Bowe said not only does the company have openings right now, he is also interested in establishing relationships with potential employees for the future.

"We like to have people stay interested in working with us," he said. "We try to keep that line of communication open all the time."

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