

Opportunities knock at Flagler job fair

By Aaron London

Posted Mar 1, 2019 at 2:10 PM

Updated Mar 2, 2019 at 1:08 PM

Organizers said 58 companies signed up for booth space while 132 people looking for jobs pre-registered for this year's job fair, up from 113 last year.

PALM COAST — When the Flagler County Department of Economic Opportunity organized the first Flagler County Job Fair in 2014, the county's unemployment rate was the highest in the Sunshine State and lines of job seekers stretched out the door and around the building at the Emergency Operations Center in Bunnell.

Fast forward to this year and the situation has changed. While there were still plenty of people looking for full- and part-time positions during Friday's event at the Palm Coast campus of Daytona State College, the focus was more on employers hoping to fill open positions.

“Economic things have changed in general in the nation and the county has followed suit,” said Helga van Eckert, the county’s economic development director. “We’ve been able to bring in more businesses and we’ve got more tourism in the county as well and as a result businesses are doing better so now they are looking for new employees.”

The economic recovery and the uptick in tourism were the main reasons the Hammock Beach Resort was represented at the job fair. With a long list of open positions, Eric Olsen, assistant food and beverage manager at the high-end property, said the event offered a chance to talk to a lot of potential employees.

“The job fair really gives us an opportunity to connect with a really vast number of people from multiple areas,” he said. “It allows us to access a greater job market than we usually have access to.”

Dressed in a suit and tie, newly arrived Palm Coast resident Chase Pentz perused some of the 58 employer booths set up all over the ground floor of Building 3 on the DSC campus.

“We just moved down here,” he said. “I’ve been looking online for jobs and this is a good opportunity to get face to face with people.”

Pentz said he is interested in a “labor-oriented” job, but also might take a look at a position in sales.

“You can actually interact with people instead of them reading about you on a computer screen,” he said. “You can look good on paper but if you’re not a people-person, people may not want to hire you.”

One of the stops Pentz made was at the YMCA Camp Winona booth, where Jackie Aton talked to a lot of job seekers.

“This is great for getting the word out that we are looking for staff,” she said. “It’s just a perfect opportunity to spread the word about who we are and get some outstanding staff.”

With both full-time and part-time positions available, students Gabriel Gonzales, Ariona Bass and Tyler Price were busy filling out resumes in the building lobby.

Gonzales said being able to find a part-time position is important for people trying to work and go to school at the same time.

There appeared to be plenty of opportunities for job seekers at the event with 58 companies signed up for booth space and another two companies on a waiting list for space. According to event officials, 132 people looking for jobs pre-registered for this year's job fair, up from 113 last year.

That growth is something county economic development officials have seen over the past several years.

According to Katrina Austin, project manager at the Department of Economic Opportunity, the event has grown since the inaugural event.

"We had fewer businesses but our job seekers went out the door and around the corner," she said. "This year, we had more businesses than we could accommodate."

Looking over the job fair, Flagler County Commissioner Charlie Ericksen said the growth of the event shows how much the county's economy has improved.

"We've come from just being a beach town or a retail place to getting more \$24-an-hour jobs being offered here," he said.

For van Eckert, the increase in participating businesses is a clear indication of the county's economic strength.

"It's a wonderful upward spiral that we're seeing," she said.