

Job seekers cross one-year mark

Westford Eagle (MA)-September 2, 2010

Author: Joyce Pellino Crane, jcrane@cnc.com

The first time Emmanuelle Lacrosaz-Rouanet attended the Westford Job Seekers Network in July 2009, Wendy Gloyd was also in the room for the first time. The two had no way of knowing that six months later they would be co-managing the popular networking group and still be searching for a job by the time its one-year anniversary rolled around.

So goes the state of affairs in the current sluggish economy that is teetering on a double dip recession and leaving older workers out in the cold for exceptionally long periods.

With unemployment on this Labor Day holiday in Westford at 7.7 percent, the numbers of job seekers attending the library's support group ranges from 30 to 45 each week. Online those numbers shoot up to 188 who engage in discussions and information-sharing on a weekly basis.

"These groups work for you," said Gloyd. "You get more eyes looking for opportunities and you develop relationships so you have a wider group of people looking out for opportunities that might be good for you."

Since the economy crashed in September 2008, networking groups for job seekers have proliferated in Westford and nearby towns, including Concord, Acton, and Littleton. Westford Job Seekers was founded by Barbara Yates, an engineering project manager who subsequently landed a job in February at Bedford-based RSA, the security division of Hopkinton-based EMC, Corp.

But not every positive outcome is a direct outgrowth of the job seekers group.

Lacrosaz-Rouanet received a job offer less than two weeks ago by networking with a former co-worker who was also the hiring manager for the position.

"He knew my background," she said. "He knew the type of job I was looking for."

The pieces fell into place for Lacrosaz-Rouanet, but not without a 25 percent pay cut from her previous position with Pharm-Eco Labs in Devens.

The chemist, who has extensive project management experience, said pay cuts are typical for many of the job seekers who land jobs in the current market.

"Quite a few mentioned in their landing stories that the salary would be lower," she said.

A rite of passage among group members is the story of how they secured a job offer.

The subject line in their email invariably contains the word "landed," often followed by an exclamation mark. The story typically provides a lengthy description of the approach the successful job seeker took toward getting hired.

Last week Lacrosaz-Rouanet was preparing to write her own good news story - finally after a year and four months. With a verbal offer at a North Shore pharmaceutical company in hand, she was just waiting for a formal written offer before announcing her departure from the group. Regardless of how the job lead came about, Lacrosaz-Rouanet credits the job seekers group with helping her through a long dark tunnel.

"Throughout my ordeal the Westford Job Seekers group kept me sane," she said.

Gloyd can't write her landed story, just yet, but it's not for a lack of trying. The project manager who is seeking another position with a small design agency, is studying social media marketing with an eye toward becoming an expert in the field. To that end, she offers workshops and presentations on the topic to groups around the region and posts related articles on the Job Seekers Yahoo

discussion group. To join, members must attend at least one Job Seekers meeting in the flesh. The group meets every Wednesday at 2 p.m. in the J. V. Fletcher Library, 50 Main St.

From 1998 to 2009, Gloyd served as a liaison between client and designer for an Andover based design agency. In June 2009 the 10-person firm laid off its staff of designers, layout artists, creative directors, and clerical staff. The two owners sold the building and now rent space in North Andover.

Its downfall began after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, said Gloyd. The firm had been heavily invested in travel clients. But after the tragic attacks the travel industry collapsed across the country and the firm lost those clients, never to fully recover.

"The company was leaking money for those nine years," said Gloyd. "Revenues were declining but the owners thought it was going to bounce back."

It never did.

Her job search has become her latest management project.

Gloyd keeps a spreadsheet of every contact and notes every shared communication and when it takes place.

"That's a classic sales approach to working your contact list," she said. "They call it 'touching' in marketing speak."

So far her networking efforts have yielded freelance work for a mobile device marketer who needs web content.

But, she views the effort as another step toward sharpening her social media marketing skills.

"My feeling is this give me more experience in another area in marketing where I'm not as experienced," she said.

"If he does ramp up this business, there is the possibility that he might think of me and I'll be ahead of the curve."

Getting a foot in the door before the masses of unemployed is a distinct advantage, said both Gloyd and Lacrosaz-Rouanet, but it also takes a little luck.

Even before receiving an invitation to apply for her newly landed job, Lacrosaz-Rouanet said she had submitted a resume on her own and hoped for the best. When company officials became interested in her, they searched for the submitted application and resume but couldn't find the documents in the computer system.

"That's important for job seekers to know - that resumes can get lost," she said.

In the past 13 months, as they became more knowledgeable about searching for a job, both women branded themselves as net workers willing to take on leadership roles. One or the other has made presentations and led workshops on such topics as resume writing, improving interviewing skills, and benefiting from Linked In, the online social networking site for professionals.

Group statistics though no one keeps a record of group members' ages, one glance around the room suggests that most are baby boomers, said Lacrosaz-Rouanet. The white hair and the ages of their children are give-aways, she noted.

"My experience is that younger people are finding jobs much faster than the baby boomers," she said.

Baby boomers had reached a level of experience that out priced them for today's declining revenues, she said.

"A lot of them became managers and the managers were the levels that were cut," she said.

The high number of unemployed workers in town probably comes from the mid-level management structure, added Lacrosaz-Rouanet, 45.

Out of a workforce of 12,200, there are 939 residents unemployed, according to the state Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development.

Statewide 9.1 percent are unemployed, and the national rate is 9.5 percent.

"The difficulty of the people in Westford is that they're baby boomers and their salary (levels) are probably too high," Lacrosaz-Rouanet said.

At 42, Gloyd is too young to be considered a baby boomer - typically defined as those born between 1946 and 1964- but her frustration over her long period of unemployment is no less heartfelt.

"I do get down sometimes, but I feel lucky that my financial situation is not perilous," she said. "I've heard of people applying for food stamps and living off their retirement, which I haven't had to dig into."

Gloyd pays rent to her parents who share their home with her. The situation eases a burden.

"So I have a safety net," she said.

The end of the tunnel for Lacrosaz-Rouanet, the uncertainty has almost ended.

But her memories of the job seekers group are good ones.

"They are people who are in the same situation and understand what you're going through, who understands the difficulties you're going through and who are really, really supportive and try to help you," she said. "It's a great community."

Emmanuelle Lacrosaz-Rouanet COURTESY PHOTO

Wendy Gloyd STAFF PHOTO BY JOYCE PELLINO CRANE
Section: NewsPage: 1, 18

Record Number: 361701841 Copyright, 2010, CP Media Inc. d.b.a. Community Newspaper Company. No content may be reproduced without the owner's written permission.

http://docs.newsbank.com/s/InfoWeb/aggdocs/NewsBank/13208C21CBF98188/0F7F8B88A83B8895?p_multi=ZBDH&s_lang=en-US