

Job seekers connect at Spring Job Fair

by Sherren Foss and Joe Sherman | Posted: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 7:00 am

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The Spring Job Fair, hosted by the Leech Lake Area Chamber of Commerce, the Walker Rotary Club and Cass County Economic Development Corp., was held April 15-16 at BlueWater Lodge south of Walker.

The mission of the event was to bring awareness of the numerous job opportunities available in the Walker, Hackensack and Akeley areas. Jobs included sales, service, skilled and unskilled labor, bookkeeping, IT, clerical and management.

The event was underwritten by Bank Forward, Leech Lake Gaming and Walker Rotary, with assistance from the Cass County Economic Development Corporation. The Leech Lake Chamber, Walker Rotary Club and several volunteers planned the details to make it a fulfilling experience.

Forty local businesses welcomed nearly 200 would-be job seekers. Each applicant was asked if he or she would be interested in speaking with a Job Skills Adviser prior to a face-to-face interview or just picking up a job application.

The adviser asked applicants about their current and past job skills, interests and concerns. Attendees were shown a list of businesses in attendance and positions available.

After some discussion and encouragement, applicants headed for the business booths where one-on-one discussions were held.

At the Job Fair, businesses were provided with one curtained booth, table and chairs, news and advertising in the following market areas: Walker, Hackensack, Akeley, Laporte, Park Rapids, Longville, Cass Lake, Pine River south to Brainerd, Grand Rapids and Bemidji.



Job seekers spoke with various businesses about positions being offered. Finding the right job was made a bit easier with the 40 businesses that need to fill hundreds of positions.

Responses from Spring Job Fair attendees was so encouraging that the committee is planning a 2017 Spring Job Fair. Details will be available soon on the Leech Lake and Hackensack Area Chambers of Commerce websites.

The event was promoted and advertised in area newspapers and shoppers, on TV and radio stations, at college and high school venues, on blogs, Facebook and websites, through posters, six highway banners, business marquees, in church bulletins and on two highway electronic signs.

Attendee surveys was handed out with 107 of them returned. Here are some of the responses.

How helpful was the Job Fair?

90 very, 15 somewhat, 2 not helpful.

Did you find jobs of interest?

80 yes, 3 no.

Were you able to set up an interview?

30 yes, 24 no.

How did you hear about the Job Fair?

30 newspapers, 30 on-line and social media, 25 radio, 14 friend, 13 signs, 13 school and Bemidji Work Force, 3 local businesses, 1 mom, 1 grandma.

What did you find most useful?

Having businesses in one spot. Saturday. Convenient location. Early reminders. Great networking. Great welcoming group (greeters and job skills advisers). Taking applications home.

What would you like to see different?

More variety of businesses. More health care. More signs on road. Salary or pay scales posted. Evening hours. Set up during college breaks. More refreshments (of course).

A survey was also handed out to the businesses, with 32 returns. Responses included:

Facility: 28 excellent, 4 good.

Dates and times: 11 excellent, 16 good, 1 fair, earlier in the day, one day event.

Process used to register: 11 excellent, 11 good, 1 fair.

Advertising: 20 excellent, 11 good, 1 fair.

Opportunity to interview: 17 excellent, 13 good, 2 fair.

Overall organization: 21 excellent, 9 good.

Would you participate again? 30 yes, 2 maybe.

Several people were hired on the spot, some were called later Friday night and hired after an in-depth phone interview, and several asked to stop by a business for further interviews. At this time we do not have a tally of how many people were hired, as the total response has not filtered back to the committee.

In 2017 organizers plan to rearrange the booth sites, having learned more about traffic flow. They also should be able to accommodate more businesses and thus have more job offerings.

The Spring Job Fair committee thanks all attendees for showing up with enthusiasm and professionalism. Our hope was that great connections would be made, and many were.

For more information on the 2016 or 2017 Spring Job Fair, contact Sherman at (218) 547-1827 or Cindy Wannarka at 547-1313.