

Unemployed? How to get back in the game

By Amy Hillenburg
ahillenb@md-times.com
1/4/2009

MOORESVILLE — First you hear the rumors, then a few key positions disappear and budgets are cut. More layoffs occur, but you've got several years invested with this company. You've worked hard and put in extra hours. Surely, your job is secure.

That's what Curt Peyton thought after spending nine years with an auto dealership. He was in management, and even though the past three years had been hard for the auto industry, auto sales and service was all he knew.

But when the dealership was sold, his job soon went away. Peyton spent nine months with another automotive group in Crawfordsville, but that didn't last. By the spring of 2008, he was again without work.

His wife, Michele, is employed at the Indiana University Medical Center in Indianapolis. The two have children and grandchildren. Their Mooresville residence is modest.

Peyton said hanging onto his home and keeping his family intact are his greatest blessings. After more than seven months of job searching, he is employed again at a big dealer group in Terre Haute as director of operations.

For Phillip Will of Mooresville, things haven't ended as well. He's been job searching for more than a year. He's not at retirement age yet, but he's crossed the 60-year milestone.

Will was in contract management at a school bus vendor for Indianapolis Public Schools. He has plenty of experience in transportation systems, tour buses, trucking and in the solid waste business.

"Losing your job affects your ego; but most of all, your pride. What's sad about this is that I still have a lot to offer a company, and I'm willing to work hard," Will said. The problem is that for every available position, there are hundreds of applicants.

"And most of them are half my age," Will said. "Why should employers pay me a higher salary when they can get by with paying younger people less money?"

He added that it's frustrating to apply online, because you don't usually see the employer's reaction to your resume, and you don't know if the person even read your e-mail. "I've had some interviews and discussions. I went to a job fair because a friend encouraged me to go," Will said.

"People also call and say they want to set up an interview, so you start feeling hopeful. Then, they call back and say the job has been filled. Or they don't call you back at all."

Rick Lee lost his job in Decatur Township just before Christmas. It wasn't like he didn't know it was coming.

"I worked for American Wood Molding in AmeriPlex. It had been downsizing and consolidated some departments," Lee said. "In the last six months, they cut back 30 to 40 percent."

Lee began putting out feelers before he was laid off, just to be on the safe side — in case the inevitable did happen. He's married to Julie Kyle-Lee, Academy of Hoosier Heritage Museum in Mooresville manager, and the couple has one son.

Lee said he's lucky in a way, because his wife has many connections in the area. It gives him hope that something will come up.

"We've also got our house and cars paid off, and we have some money saved, so we're better off than a lot of people," Lee said.

He's a musician, and he would love to pursue that passion full-time.

"But work is too unreliable for paying your bills," Lee said. "I love it, though. With my music, I could work with kids and in programs for senior citizens."

Networking, sharing info vital

Even though only one of those three men has found work, they all agree that an Internet presence, networking and keeping your ear to the ground are vital components of getting back in the career game. It also helps, Lee said, if you have a supportive family and circle of friends.

And there's a new secret weapon developing among men and women seeking work — job search support groups.

Paula Hite, a licensed clinical social worker and Christian family counselor, said Grace Church in Mooresville did a family needs study last March. The staff found that there were many in the congregation facing more than spiritual needs. They were going through a job crisis and financial problems as a result.

"We already offered (Dave Ramsey's) Financial Peace University and Crown Financial Planning," Hite said. "But we thought it would be even more helpful if people got together to share information and online job resources."

Peyton helped her develop a program, and they began meeting with 15 members before Thanksgiving. They called the group, "Ready, Aim, You're Hired."

They used Creative Job Search material found online from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. Will said he found out about it and began attending.

"We started meeting once a week and talked about finances, resumes, interviews, networking — even the emotions that losing your job can bring up," Hite said.

The group also had a professional visit their meeting to conduct mock interviews and talk to members about what to expect from employers in today's job market.

"Anybody can start one of these groups. Ours just happened to be Christian-based. It can include blue collar, white collar, male and female members," Hite said. "You have to keep at it and be determined. It helps to have faith in God and believe in his plan for your life."

Hite said there are some good online resources. One her group has used is Quintessential Careers. Others, like Career Builder, Monster.com and LinkedIn, extend searches nationally and internationally. These online resources help applicants develop a profile and invite trusted colleagues and contacts to keep them updated on new job possibilities. They also allow job seekers to find new business opportunities, potential clients and talk to experts in career fields.

Peyton said he also attended Mooresville Chamber of Commerce meetings to find more contacts in his field and to put the word out locally that he was available. Both Martinsville and Mooresville have active chambers and networking is a regular feature of both chambers' monthly meetings.

Employment agencies act as recruiters, trainers

Hite said WorkOne, which has offices in Martinsville, Mooresville and Indianapolis, has "awesome job seminars and many of their workshops are free."

According to its Web site, WorkOne has offices in Mooresville and Plainfield. It is under contract with the Central Indiana Workforce board and provides job services in Boone, Hamilton, Hancock, Hendricks, Johnson, Morgan and Shelby counties. The Indiana Department of Workforce Development partners with WorkOne to help people become employed. Services target all types of applicants: new workers, career changers, unemployed, underemployed, laid off, people with disabilities and veterans. Clients must register with the Indiana Career Connect job matching system.

And don't forget employment companies.

Elwood Staffing specialist Michelle Norris said their offices are recruiters for local companies. The branch in Camby covers the Mooresville, Indianapolis and Decatur Township. There is also one in Plainfield. The service is free to applicants. Norris said it is the employers who pay Elwood Staffing.

"Most of our positions are light industrial and clerical; some technical jobs, also," Norris said. "But lately, we've been getting a lot of people come in who are very educated and highly qualified. They're willing to take whatever they can get."

She said wait times can vary, depending on the job. Clients might wait a few days or even weeks before an opening. They also can apply online with Elwood.

"If someone puts a resume on our Web site, the person is contacted within 24 hours by one of our staff," Norris said. "If they get a job through us and it doesn't work out, they can come back in and talk with us. We can try to find something else for them. We will even tweak a resume, but we don't train people on how to write one."

On the Web

Quintessential Careers — www.quintcareers.com/

Career Builder.com — www.careerbuilder.com/

Monster.com — www.monster.com/

LinkedIn — www.linkedin.com/

Unemployment figures

According to the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics online, Morgan County is at its highest unemployment rate since 1998.

As of October 2008, the preliminary unemployment rate was 5.7 percent. It is the third time in 2008 that the rate has been over 5 percent. It also reached that level in March 2005 and February 2006.

In October 2007, it was 3.7 percent for the county.

In Indiana, the preliminary unemployment rate for November 2008 was 7.1 percent.

It was 4.5 percent in November 2007.