

News

Free Services for Job Seekers, Employers at Workforce Central

As seen in the *Sturbridge Times Magazine Country Living*

By **Stephanie Richards**

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Donna Kondracki started as a receptionist at the corporate office of a health care company 15 years ago and worked her way up to the executive assistant to the CEO. The Charlton resident thought she had longevity at the company until she found herself laid off after reorganization and downsizing. After filing for unemployment insurance, she went to the Workforce Central Career Center in Southbridge. It is a federally and state-funded Massachusetts One-Stop Career Center. "This is the first time in my life I found myself unemployed and it was a jolt to my self-esteem. I was hesitant about going to the Workforce Central Career Center at first, not knowing what to expect. But it was apparent from the moment I walked in that everyone was there to help you," Kondracki said. "I'm a strong believer in a great support system. I have that in my husband, family and friends. But this added a professional support system. I know I have great value, but the Center's staff is good at making you realize that and provides workshops and resources to help in your job search."

The Workforce Central Career Center is one of 32 Statewide that provide employment and training resources for job seekers and employers. The Center is housed in a 4,200 square foot building on the second floor of 5 Optical Drive in Southbridge. A variety of brochures and flyers are available when you walk in the door, including recruitment information and tip sheets on how to reach goals. "There are two main misconceptions about what we do. We are not the unemployment office or a staffing agency. We operate under the Department of Labor and Workforce Development and are a one stop career center," said Kathy Joy, Operations Manager of the Workforce Central Career Center. "We provide many resources and services, which include having an on-site, unemployment insurance benefits counselor to assist people having problems with claims. However, we don't file unemployment insurance claims. There are two options to do that, including online www.mass.gov/dua or by calling the Unemployment Call Center (877. 626.6800)."

People who want to use the Workforce Central Career Center services are first asked to register using JobQuest (www.mass.gov/jobquest), a secure government website that matches skills, education and experience with a database that has thousands of available jobs. "The site grabs jobs from other websites; it really is the best job search tool," Joy said. There are 15 workshops that cover a diverse range of topics to provide tools in the job search process. A sampling includes resume writing and critique, exploring occupational options, interviewing techniques and using age to your advantage. Mock interview and practice phone screening sessions are also offered to participants so they can review recorded sessions to hone skills. Nine computers (one handicap accessible) are available to use as a resource to learn or brush up on skills. A self-paced tutorial program, "Professor Teaches," can be accessed to help learn beginning and advanced skills



in the Microsoft Suite package and QuickBooks. "It is a very detailed and comprehensive program. Clients can be tested on their skills and if they get 100 percent, we give them a certificate of participation which can help in the job search process," said Joy, who has been at Workforce Central for 17 years. "There is also a PC lab where clients can access useful websites to research jobs, or update their resumes." The Center gives priority of service to all veterans. When Navy Veteran Patrick Boyd was laid off as an IT Manager in February, he went online and applied for unemployment benefits. While doing so, he saw that there was a seminar he needed to take at a State

One-Stop Career Center and found the Workforce Central Career Center in Southbridge, just five minutes from his home. Boyd said his eyes have been opened to major differences in today's search process and the value of services at the Center. "After going to the initial seminar, I have attended several others including one on writing a resume. I realized I needed to revise my entire resume—it included too much information and needed to highlight my skills in a different way," said Boyd, who was a nuclear reactor operator in

The Navy. "The Veteran's Counselor was very helpful in providing information as well as encouragement and support. Four counselors now know me by my first name." An Operation ABLE counselor is also available on-site for those 55 years and older to assist them in finding employment. The counselor works with host agencies (like libraries and hospitals) to give clients who may lack skills a chance to learn them on a temporary basis 20 hours a week (subsidized by the federal government). In addition to assisting job seekers, the Workforce Central Career Center works with employers

and has a dedicated Business Service Representative. Companies can review a large database of job seekers in the state and participate in on-site recruiting or interviewing, with the Center also offering referrals of qualified applicants. The day of the interview, SCHOTT North America of Southbridge was doing on-site recruiting. "We also help them find business solutions, such as seeking workforce training funds to train incumbent workers," Joy said. "One example has been the need by manufacturing employers to fill Computer Numeric Controlled (CNC) machinist jobs and increase multiple skill levels of current workers. The Center representatives helped form a consortium of manufacturing employers to pursue a state grant to train their current workers. It was the first consortium in the state to receive funding and the grant is now in its second year with 11 employers participating." In addition to partnerships with employers, the Center has connections with higher education to assist job seekers. Quinsigamond Community College's (QCC) Southbridge campus is located in the same building and staff will refer clients interested in pursuing a college degree. A QCC instructor also teaches the Navigating Career Choices workshop to provide job seekers with online tools to explore occupations and research labor market information. The Center's services are free, provided by federal and state funds. Job seekers do not have to be employed to use the services. "The goal is to take someone who may feel fearful or have a low self-esteem and raise their confidence level up, giving them the tools and skills to present themselves to employers," Joy said. "A top notch resume is the ticket to an interview and good interview techniques to a possible job. We help the entry-level worker to high level executives." The Workforce Central Career Center is open from 8:45 a.m. to 5 p.m., Mondays through Thursdays and from 9:30 to 5 p.m., Fridays. For more information, call 508.765.6430 or go to www.workforcecentralma.org. On Facebook, search "Workforce Central MA"