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Jobs boot camp draws 700

January 29, 2010

By Bill Silverfarb

Being gainfully employed is a wonderful thing, Carl Guardino told a crowd in San Mateo yesterday. It is also easier to find the job you really want when you already have a job, he said.

Guardino is the chief executive officer of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, which represents about 300 companies. He and a slew of other employers and speakers gave advice to hundreds of job seekers who flooded the San Mateo Event Center yesterday to seek tools and tips on finding work in this slow economy.

About 700 people attended the "Job Hunters Boot Camp," sponsored by U.S. Rep. Jackie Speier, D-San Mateo, and San Mateo County Supervisor Mark Church and featured experts in the field of biotech, health care and energy among others.

Attendees were also privy to resume critiques, interview coaching and resource consultation. Resource tables were manned by several nonprofit and government agency representatives who provided attendees on training opportunities

Health care is one of the fastest-growing sectors when it comes to jobs, said Kaiser Permanente recruiter Chris Irving. The industry will need more registered nurses but will also need more workers in the allied health profession. Allied health includes radiology technician and diagnostic medical sonography jobs, for instance.

Kaiser has an allied health school in the East Bay.

Irving encouraged job seekers to take entry-level jobs with Kaiser that may not seem appealing at first but can lead to greater opportunities in the future.

In the biotech field, a need exists for bioinformatics specialists, scientific program analysts, animal technicians, microbiologists and diagnostic analysts, said BayBio Institute Chairman Jeffrey Peterson.

Up to 30 percent of jobs in the biotech industry only require an associate's degree or certification course, Guardino said.

Peterson encouraged those interested in the biotech industry to consider internships at local companies.

Ashraf Hussein was at the Event Center yesterday looking for help with interview skills.

"A lot of emphasis was placed on communication skills and networking," she said.

Another attendee, Maria Renteria, was interested in finding technical training in the biotech field. She visited resource booths from Skyline College and San Mateo County Libraries for information on the industry.

"They say there will be jobs in that field so I'm interested," she said.

Silicon Valley currently has an unemployment rate of 11.9 percent in four counties and 40 cities, Guardino said. A full 53 percent of engineers in Silicon Valley are foreign born, he said, and venture capitalists are still investing in high-tech companies.

Pacific Gas and Electric's Mario Rendon encouraged attendees to seek out green job skills as the movement is expanding.

"Stimulus money is going toward training for green jobs," Rendon said. "PG&E has an aging workforce with 40 percent being eligible to retire in the next 5 to 10 years."

There is currently a pilot program at the College of San Mateo that offers certification in electrical power that could lead to jobs at the utility, he said. Rendon helps coordinate external training programs and initiatives for the company.

The biotech industry is expected to expand by 12,000 new jobs in Northern California alone, Peterson said.