

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette | Northwest Arkansas Times | Springdale Morning News | Rogers Morning News | Benton County Daily Record

NWAonlineWednesday, December 9,
2009
Current Weather for NWA:Welcome **Angela Peacock**
Edit | Help | LogoutFair 21 F
(more weather)[Home](#) [News](#) [Sports](#) [Opinion](#) [Business](#) [Features](#) [Media](#) [Weeklies](#) [Blogs](#)[Homes](#) [Jobs](#) [Classifieds](#)[Weather](#) [Calendar](#) [Obituaries](#) [Advertising](#) [Archives](#) [Subscribe](#) [Contact](#) [NiE](#)MINIMALLY INVASIVE
FASTER RECOVERYROLLER
WEIGHT LOSS INSTITUTE

Jobless Seek Out Training Opportunities

Area Unemployment Rate Hits 5.3 Percent

By [Christie Swanson](#)

Thursday, December 3, 2009

[Print item](#)

SPRINGDALE — Unemployment continues to increase in the area, but many of those out of work are using the opportunity to train for new careers.

Jason Spencer is one of the 5.3 percent the Bureau of Labor Statistics said are unemployed in the area. The preliminary numbers for October were released Wednesday.

Last October, the unemployment rate for the metropolitan statistical area that includes Washington and Benton counties, as well as McDonald County in Missouri, was 3.6 percent. The state unemployment numbers for the same time frame increased from 4.8 percent to 6.9 percent.

Spencer, a member of the Arkansas National Guard based out of Lincoln, is home between deployments. He has been deployed twice and is expecting to be called to serve again soon.

"I don't want to start a job and then have to leave for a deployment," Spencer said Wednesday from the conference room at SynergyTech in Springdale.

SynergyTech, a business and industry driven training consortium on the campus of Northwest Technical Institute, awarded Spencer a \$12,000 scholarship this fall. Miguel Rodriguez also received a scholarship.

The consortium is primarily used by 23 business members, but also offers four or five scholarships annually to people out of work and looking for training.

Spencer said he is a mechanic, but is eager to learn more.

"I wanted to get more into the electrical side," he said. "Anyone can turn a wrench."

SynergyTech started in 1996 and classes were taught more of a classroom setting. That changed in 2004 when Pat Flenniken, maintenance training coordinator at SynergyTech, said they switched philosophies and began more hands-on training after being approached by local manufacturers.

Spencer said the SynergyTech program is "awesome" because the electronics side is easy to learn and the mechanics side is very hands-on.

"I can pick and choose a job now that I have the skills employers want," Spencer said.

The center offers classes in maintenance-technical areas such as mechanical drives, basic electrical machines and systems and motor control.

Kathy Deck, director for the Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Arkansas, said training programs are important, if they are focused on the right area.

[Today's Most Popular Stories](#)

"They tend to focus on today's and yesterday's needs, but (businesses) can't predict the future. They don't have a crystal ball," she said. "What we want is a skilled, flexible workforce."

Rose Sparrow, a resource specialist for the Northwest Arkansas Certified Development Company at the Arkansas Workforce Center at Siloam Springs, said that is her goal: To help people find careers, not just jobs.

"I want to see their American dream filled," Sparrow said. A career fair is planned for Dec. 18 in Siloam Springs.

She said of her 45 clients, 25 have graduated from a program and found jobs in their career.

She is able to help her clients through the Trade Adjustment Assistance program. The state program is for workers who lose their jobs or whose hours and wages are reduced as a result of increased imports. Sparrow said schooling is also available for people laid off because of little or no available work.

The program will pay for up to two years of schooling.

Flenniken said they also work with the state on the Trade Adjustment Assistance program.

"We are working with the state to see if they have any other program we fit under. A lot of their programs offer degrees; we don't offer a degree, just training," he said.

Flenniken said they would like to offer more scholarships, but SynergyTech has to pay for those programs out of pocket. He said tuition to the program is a hurdle for many potential students. Tuition is \$750 a class for non-members and \$645 for students working for member companies.

As a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, money made from tuition goes back into the program, Flenniken said.

One financial stream SynergyTech has been able to tap into is the Existing Workforce Training Program grant available through the Arkansas Economic Development Commission. The program provides financial assistance to Arkansas' businesses and eligible consortia of businesses for upgrading the skills of the existing workforce.

Jack Kinney, training manager for Glad Manufacturing in Rogers, said initial and ongoing training are both vital in staying competitive. Glad is a business member of SynergyTech, and Kinney said he is sold on the idea.

"If you can give people more skills, you hopefully can retain the best employees," he said.

At a Glance

Arkansas Workforce Center Career Fair

When: 2 to 5 p.m. Dec. 18

Where: Community Christian Fellowship, 525 S. Lincoln St., Siloam Springs

Source: Staff Report

Comments

To report abuse or misuse of this area please hit the "Suggest Removal" link in the comment to alert our online managers. Please read our [comment policy](#).

Use the comment form below to begin a discussion about this content.

Post a comment



Angela Peacock (screen name: [cber_walton.uark.edu](#))

[Change your User information](#)

[Change your avatar](#)

