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A JOB FAIR AND A FORECAST

Talk of brighter days



ROSS TAYLOR PHOTOS | THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

Ralph Vincent Jr., who has worked at International Paper's mill for 33 years, meets with Kris Miller, a recruiter for Georgia Pacific, at the job fair in Franklin. Three dozen employers were represented, and at least 28 job offers were extended, an official said.

the turnout

The event targeted workers at International Paper's mill in Franklin, which will close. An estimated 1,100 people attended.



Event aims to help workers at closing mill

By Philip Walzer
The Virginian-Pilot

FRANKLIN

More than 1,000 people on Wednesday jammed a job fair targeted for workers of the soon-to-close International Paper mill.

"We have as many people here, if not more, than for our graduation," said Randy Betz, vice president of workforce development at Paul D. Camp Community College, which held the fair.

Those who attended mostly spoke positively about the number and scope of companies that were recruiting.

"I'm encouraged, but until that offer is made to you, that encouragement is somewhat limited," said Lloyd Edler, 48, of Hampton, a paper mill employee for 15 years.

Some employees, such as Edler, were permitted to take time from their shifts

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An ODU team believes Hampton Roads' goods and services will expand 2.4 percent this year. U.S. output is expected to increase 2.8 percent.

job market

Hampton Roads is likely to lose 1,500 jobs this year. It lost an estimated 6,000 jobs in 2009.

housing market

Home prices are expected to fall, but an extension of the tax credit for first-time buyers could help sales.

what's next

A small recovery is expected despite more job losses in the region. Two major sectors of the regional economy - tourism and port traffic - are likely to improve after weathering difficulties last year.

MILL | *No closing date for the site has been announced*

to attend the fair, said Desmond Stills, a mill spokesman.

Gregory Darden, a machine operator at the mill for 15 years, said he appreciated the chance to meet recruiters rather than communicate by computer.

"It's good that everybody's talking to you," said Darden, 49, of Suffolk. "They're giving people opportunities and taking your resume."

One of Darden's stops, the Norfolk Naval Shipyard booth, was among the most popular sites at the fair, held at the college's Regional Workforce Development Center.

Three dozen employers were represented, including Norfolk Southern Corp.,

Northrop Grumman Corp., Colonna's and Lyon shipyards, Boise Paper, Planters Peanuts and the cities of Chesapeake, Suffolk and Virginia Beach.

Job opportunities included positions in apprenticeship programs, welders, mechanics, designers, accounting clerks, and utility and maintenance workers.

All of the companies that attended had indicated a willingness to hire people, Betz said. At least 28 job offers were extended at the fair, which ran from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., said Robert Sharak, a spokesman for Opportunity Inc., a regional work force agency that organized the fair.

About 1,025 job-seekers signed in, Sharak said. In-

cluding those who hadn't signed up, Sharak estimated that at least 1,100 people attended.

Ten colleges or schools also had tables, including Paul D. Camp, Tidewater Community College, ECPI College of Technology, and the University of Phoenix.

"My big decision is: Do I want to continue turning wrenches or do I want to possibly do something else?" said Howard Bradshaw, 50, of Carrsville. He and his wife, Debi, have worked at the mill for more than 30 years.

All of those interviewed said they did not yet know when their jobs would end or when the mill would shut down. Several sections already have been closed.

A few said they expected the next phase of layoffs to occur in early March. Stills, the mill spokesman, has said no further layoffs would occur before the end of Febru-

ary. He said this week that a closing date for the plant has not been announced.

Workers described a solemn mood at the mill.

"There's nothing there to lift you up," Edler said. "Everybody has the same pressures, the same frustrations, the same not-knowing."

Ralph Vincent Jr. felt a bit cheered after the fair.

Vincent, 51, of Franklin has been at the mill for 33 years. Both of his grandfathers and his father worked there, too.

He's already lined up a few job possibilities, he said, "but I have some here that I'm probably going to look at."

Vincent said he was impressed with the array of positions, including those at shipyards, that were advertised at the fair. "That's where a bulk of our employees are going to go."

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