

## More than 600 turn out for Brentwood job fair

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BRENTWOOD -- Hold a job fair and they will come.

And on Thursday they did: Job seekers converged on Brentwood by the hundreds to attend the East County Career Fair.

The line of people waiting in the city's community center for the event to start stretched around the foyer as 61 employers geared up to meet the masses.

No fewer than 658 hopefuls had registered online for the three-hour fair, which was organized by the Workforce Development Board of Contra Costa County and the state's Employment Development Department.

"It's certainly a large event," said Stephen Baiter, executive director of the Workforce Development Board. "It's surprising ... given the fact that unemployment has dropped so much."

But although the job market is making a strong recovery -- joblessness countywide recently reached an eight-year low -- plenty of people are still looking for work and the need is even greater in East Contra Costa, he said.

Dozens of employers accepted the invitation to participate, ranging from retail businesses, staffing firms and security companies to colleges, a railway and government agencies.

Prospective workers of all ages arrived with sheaves of resumes and wearing everything from power suits and high heels to khaki and tennis shoes.

Among them was Maria, a 54-year-old grandmother of eight who had arrived an hour early to be first in line when the doors opened. The Brentwood resident, who requested anonymity lest she jeopardize her job as a certified nursing assistant, planned to make a beeline for Kaiser Permanente's booth in hopes of getting a one-on-one interview for a patient care technician position.

"I'm claiming this job -- it's gonna be my job," Maria declared. "I have a good feeling about this."

Whereas some had a laser-like focus on which employers they wanted to contact, others including April Lujano weren't as focused. The 29-year-old Discovery Bay resident wants to return to work after two years as a stay-at-home mom but knew only that she was interested in some type of clerical job.

She considered the fair a chance to conduct a reconnaissance mission of sorts, finding out what skills employers were looking for.

"I'm doing my research -- hands-on," Lujano said.

And there were those who came with no job description in mind.

Brothers Devin and Diondre Matthews, both unemployed, were open to virtually all possibilities.

"I'll look for anything," said Devin Matthews, a 22-year-old Antioch resident who had dressed to the hilt for the occasion.

Similarly, Diondre Matthews, 21, had been applying to restaurants and grocery stores to drum up the college money he needs to become a veterinary assistant.

The crowd kept employers hopping as they fielded questions behind tables littered with candy, lanyards, plastic piggy banks, magnets and other giveaways.

On one side of the room, the state Employment Development Department was promoting a position that calls for critiquing resumes and offering interviewing tips.

The county Public Defender's Office was offering a different kind of leg up: A new law now allows the agency to petition the courts to reduce some job seekers' felony convictions to misdemeanors, an attorney explained.

Although the FBI was looking for special agents, most who stopped by its booth were more interested in less visible positions that don't involve carrying a gun along with the responsibilities that entails, a representative said.

Nearby, BART Police Department's Jeffrey Zwetsloot found himself explaining to the curious that, yes, he is actually a sworn officer and not a security guard.

Some people don't realize how drawn out the application process is, he added, noting that it can take up to a year for candidates who don't already have a law enforcement background to get hired.

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