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Cuyamaca College East County Career Fair set for May 5

Community interest likely to be high as more people look for jobs

EL CAJON – With unemployment figures topping a record 9 percent in San Diego County, Cuyamaca College’s 15th annual Career Fair set for Tuesday, May 5, is a can’t-miss occasion for job- and career-seekers.

Nearly 60 companies and organizations will be represented at the always-popular event, set for 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. in the new student center at the north end of the campus near the Cuyamaca College Drive West entrance off Jamacha Road in Rancho San Diego.

The free event offers students and the community an opportunity to meet employers and possibly get hired on the spot. Companies and organizations will be discussing the job market, interviewing and collecting resumes.

“Even with the depressed job market, the career fair at Cuyamaca College continues to draw employers because we are an excellent source of well-prepared, motivated workers looking to get a foothold in the job market,” said Dr. Cristina Chiriboga, interim college president. “Community colleges continue to produce a steady stream of workers ready and eager to accept the challenge of an increasingly competitive and technology-driven workplace.”

Governing Board President Bill Garrett said that it’s important to remember that the Cuyamaca College event is more than a job fair and provides exposure to careers that students and other fair-goers may have never even thought of.

“In addition to job interviews, attendees can benefit enormously by gathering information about a variety of career fields and gain insight into the local job market,” he said. “Plus, for those considering

a career change, or who are seeing signs that their current jobs are at risk, the fair is a great way to scope out new possibilities.

“It offers a chance to speak with representatives from many areas to help people decide on a career. Even if an industry is not hiring right now, students can ask important questions of representatives who can share what is really happening with the career in the future.”

Cuyamaca programs, including computer and information science, or CIS, and Grossmont College programs, including occupational therapy assistance and respiratory therapy, will have tables set up at the fair to provide a peek into what the careers entail. The East County Career Center will also participate as an additional resource that fair-goers can tap for insight into the job market.

Laurie Brown, Cuyamaca College Career Services coordinator, said the 58 vendors confirming attendance is the same as last year’s numbers and is higher than she had anticipated, given the economic climate. Other colleges sponsoring job and career fairs have been reporting about a 20-30 percent reduction in the number of participating employers, she said, so the continuing strong interest in Cuyamaca’s fair is positive news for local job-seekers.

As for who’s actually hiring, Brown said the most promising fields are those relating to the environment and alternative energy, highway construction, customer service, healthcare and jobs associated with the stimulus package put forth by the federal government.

Career fairs such as Cuyamaca’s have long been regarded as a valuable recruiting tool among public-sector employers who tend to cast their nets wide for a diversity of workers. Local, state and federal entities are all well represented: the California Highway Patrol, the FBI, Helix Water District, San Diego County Sheriff’s Department, the Social Security Administration, Padre Dam Municipal Water District, San Miguel Fire Department, the state National Guard, and military recruiters from the U.S. Army and Navy.

In addition to job security, the military also provides the added plus of GI Bill education benefits as high as \$1,500-\$2,000 monthly.

In August, the so-called “Post 9/11 GI Bill” goes into effect, offering the most comprehensive education benefits package since the original GI Bill became law in 1944. The new bill not only will help pay tuition, but will also provide a new monthly housing stipend and \$1,000 annually for books and supplies. For troops who extend beyond the four-year service requirement, there is the option of transferring the benefit to family members.

The smaller companies and businesses that participate in the fair historically provide foot-in-the-door opportunities and are also likely to grant less-experienced workers great latitude to perform a variety of jobs. With greater competition for jobs, workers need to make their credentials shine in terms

of their education and training. With so many employers in one spot, the career fair offers the perfect opportunity to hone those interview skills and make contacts that can pay off down the line.

“Many of the people who were laid off recently didn’t pay attention to the writing on the wall and didn’t see that things were changing,” Brown said. “They didn’t update their skills and now are left trying to play ‘catch up’ with their education.”

For more information and an up-to-date list of employers, contact the Career Center at (619) 660-4450 or visit www.cuyamaca.net/careerserv/.

Cuyamaca College is at 900 Rancho San Diego Parkway in El Cajon. For driving and campus maps, go to www.cuyamaca.edu.

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