

Selling yourself in a tough economic market

By David Hennessey

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Local residents got a crash course in surviving a teetering economy recently at the Darien Library as Jo Shute, vice president of marketing, communications and planning for The Workplace, Inc., led the "Labor Market Trends and Reinventing Yourself in a Tough Employment Market" workshop.

The Workplace, Inc. helps people prepare for careers and strengthens the workforce for employers. As Southwestern Connecticut's Regional Workforce Development Board, it administers workforce development funds and coordinates providers of job training and education programs to meet the needs of residents and employers in the Southwestern Connecticut Region.

The workshop was the third in the Money Mat-

See Unemployment on A9

ters: Surviving in Difficult Financial Times series co-sponsored by the YWCA Darien/Norwalk and the Fairfield County Chapter of the Financial Planning Association.

Shute began by discussing Connecticut labor trends and high growth industries.

"We find it's very helpful for people to have a sense of the local job market....Here's the bad news; as of January, 2009, the unemployment rate is 7.5 percent. That's a big jump over the months prior. And it's probably going to get worse before it gets better."

In December of 2008, the unemployment rate in southwest Connecticut was 6.2 percent, two percentage points more than that of December 2007, but well below January of 2009's high. Southwest Connecticut is defined by the study as Bridgeport, Stratford, Fairfield, Monroe, Trumbull, Norwalk, Wilton, Westport, Darien, New Canaan and Stamford.

Also covered in the workshop were self-marketing strategies for job seekers.

"If you do have experience in pertinent areas, that is something

you want to sell," Shute said.

She said employers are looking for basic qualities in prospective employees, even when hiring for advanced positions. Characteristics like being able to handle a consistent, high-quality workload, reliability and trustworthiness are all in high demand, she said. Communication skills, customer service skills and computer skills are also high on employers' lists of job qualifications, according to Shute.

"My basic message is that education and training pay," Shute said.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median weekly earnings of those with a doctoral degree is \$77,844 per year (as of 2007), with only a 1.4 percent unemployment rate. Those with a master's degree earned a median salary of \$60,580 per year, while those with a bachelor's degree earned a median salary of \$51,324 per year.

Richard Spann, senior vice president of Gateway International Group, also spoke at the workshop about self-marketing and career transitions.

"When you lose a job, it's as traumatic as losing a loved one or getting a divorce," Spann said.

He pointed out disconcerting trends that show little sign of letting up in the face of the economic storm. He has noticed fewer severance packages being doled out and many people working well into their 60's, past the ages that have traditionally been marked for retirement.

According to information provided by The Workplace, Inc., this is the first time in its 15-year history that growth is down in so many industries: including manufacturing, financial activities, government, professional and business services. Only educational and health services, and leisure and hospitality services, show upward trends. Those



southwest Connecticut job areas come in at plus-3.7 percent and plus-1.2 percent, respectively, over January 2008's employment numbers.

Turnover, the total number of employees being replaced divided by the number of employees now, has been highest in the lodging, health services and business services industries.

"When looking for a job, the first thing you need to do is to express what your skills are and what your interests are. Think about your accomplishments....You need to be persistent, and you need to follow up."

He urged job seekers to follow up with perspective employers up to six times. He also said job hunters must do appropriate research, look at smaller companies, utilize online resources and look for temp work, which often times will continue in the face of a hiring freeze.