

Training to boom as unemployment soars

By MICHELLE HOCTOR

AT a time when thousands of people are living in fear of unemployment, one industry is experiencing a boom as a result.

Training and recruitment is set to become the growth industry of the Illawarra as the economic downturn takes hold.

With the region's unemployment rate reaching 7.6 per cent this week and set to rise further with 281 retrenchments in the manufacturing industry, training has become a necessary lifeline.

Federal Member for Throsby Jennie George said there had been major growth in labour hire and recruitment agencies over the past decade and training outlets would follow suit as unemployment rates increased.

There are 50 training agencies in the Illawarra, including TAFE, WEA, community colleges and private operators, and a similar number of recruitment and labour outlets.

Six are contracted by the Federal Government to provide job network services for the unemployed through 15 agencies between Corrimal and Kiama.

Wollongong City Employment Training (WCET), originally Skillshare, is a registered training provider that has assisted 10,000 Illawarra people over the past 11 years.

Operations manager Lyn Watkins said services included training, education, work for the Dole programs and traineeships.

Through Work for the Dole, people were filtered into the community in a wide range of industries including retail, child care, aged care, building and construction, cabinet making and joinery, web design, office work, hospitality, RSPCA animal attendance and landscaping.

Mrs Watkins, who networks in the community to find placements, said the program was a stepping stone to employment, with a success rate of about 30 per cent.

She said that while the 281 retrenched Pacific Brands workers at Bonds Unanderra and KingGee Bellambi would be despondent, there were plenty of areas in which to retrain.

"I think they could look at productivity placements, retail, hospitality, asset maintenance, graphic design and aged care - which is one of the biggest growth industries and a lot of our Work for the Dole people obtain work out of it," she said.



Success: Laurie McIlwraith with Lynne Watkins of Wollongong City Employment and Training, which came to his aid. Picture: KEN ROBERTSON

Persistence saved Laurie

By MICHELLE HOCTOR

AFTER four years of job knockbacks, 44-year-old Laurie McIlwraith began to worry that age might be working against him.

But persistence - and retraining - paid off last week when he finally landed a full-time job.

Buoyed by his success, he has a message for sacked Pacific Brands workers.

"Don't stay at home and hide - get out there and network," he said. "Don't be afraid to retrain because there's lots on offer."

In 2005, at the age of 40, Mr McIlwraith was "shattered" to lose his job in middle management.

But he used the time to study IT at TAFE.

"I started sending out resumes by the dozen, answering job ads ...

"Most never replied and that was pretty disheartening. Was it my resume writing skills? Was it my age?"

In July, the Port Kembla man was referred to Wollongong City Employment Training for the Work for the Dole program, designing charity websites.

Now he works at Specialised Uniforms Direct.

"It's been a very positive outcome - I can afford to put food on the table and a beer in the fridge," he said.