

Job seekers pack Currituck business expo

By Reggie Ponder
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CURRITUCK — Some 300 people turned out to apply for jobs and find out more about local businesses at the 12th annual Currituck Chamber Business Expo Saturday.

Organizers said that was slightly ahead of last year's turnout.

The expo, held at Currituck County High School, also featured slightly more vendors this year. There were 50, compared with last year's 46.

Josh Bass of the Currituck Chamber of Commerce said about 80 percent of the vendors this year are companies that are hiring.

Bobby Hanig was wearing two hats — or literally, two name tags — as owner of The Pool Guy and Brindley Beach Vacations, and as chairman of the Northeastern Workforce Development Board.

Both as a business owner and as a workforce development volunteer, Hanig said he was excited about the opportunity to learn about job opportunities and job training.

At his company's booth, a lot of folks were asking about jobs.

"We've had more people looking for jobs this year than ever before," Hanig said.

Hanig explained that in previous years, many of the inquiries about jobs were from high school students looking for a summer job.

"This year there's been a lot of adults coming by looking for full-time work," Hanig said.

He said his company has full-time and part-time openings in maintenance, housecleaning and pool cleaning.

As of about 12:30 p.m., about 30 people had come by the booth to ask about jobs with Hanig's company. Another 20 or so had dropped by for general information about the company and its services, he said.

Bass said it's fairly typical for about half the people who come out for the event to be looking for jobs, with the other half interested in general information.

At the Northeastern Workforce Development Board booth, there was information available about on-the-job training opportunities that NWDB makes available.

Elton Stone, director of aviation maintenance technology at College of The Albemarle, said when he opened the booth at 10 a.m. he already had a student waiting to sign up for the aviation program. Within another couple of hours he had two more, he said.

“It seems like this is getting better and better every year,” Stone said. “I got three solid students this morning.”

Jennifer Barnak of Waterlily said she was looking for employment in an office type of job and also was seeking general information about local products and services. She said she brought her daughters — a high schooler and a 10-year-old — so they could see just how much is available in Currituck County.

Barnak said that with gasoline nearly \$4 a gallon, being able to explore jobs in one place and at one time is a great opportunity.

“It’s a great place to talk to a lot of people at one time without using up a lot of gas doing it,” Barnak said.

She called the event “fun, but hopefully profitable, too.”

Barnak said one of the most interesting booths for her was the Small Business Technology and Developmental Center at Elizabeth City State University. She said she has a couple of business ideas and found out she might be able to get some help from the SBTDC in developing her ideas and seeing where they go.

Gena Martin, a business counselor with the SBTDC, said a number of people stopped by the booth but five actually asked about services at the center.

Martin said the center offers business planning services for new and expanding businesses.

More information about the SBTDC is available at its website, www.sbtcd.org, Martin said.

While the center charges a fee for a few specialized services, most of the services are free, Martin said. If there is a fee for a service that is always made clear upfront, she said.

Shannon Kinser, assistant director of the Small Business Center at College of The Albemarle on the Roanoke Island Campus, said the number of vendors peaked at 80 or so about five years ago. But she said participation by vendors and the public this year was very strong.

The college got good leads on people interested in aviation, curriculum programs, and the small business center, she said.

“You couldn’t ask for anything better,” Kinser said.

A number of local charities also had booths at the expo, as did one church, the New Moyock United Methodist Church.

One of the charitable organizations had a fundraiser going on that was spearheaded by 11-year-old Central Elementary student.

Nathan Lapham said his parents, Robbie and Leslie Lapham, are volunteers with Currituck Kids and he wanted to do a balloon animal fundraiser for the group. He explained that his aunt and uncle gave him balloon animals at Christmas and since then he has learned how to make them.

On Saturday, he was at the Currituck Kids booth at the expo, crafting custom balloon animals for a \$1 donation to Currituck Kids. His jar was nearly full of dollar bills by the middle of the day.

April Bennett, who chairs Currituck Kids, said the organization helps students in Currituck County Schools with needs that aren't being met by other nonprofits.

Last summer, the group sent 40 kids to summer camp. Currituck Kids also presented its first-ever college scholarship last year.

The nonprofit has provided coats, shoes, eyeglasses and medicine for students.

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