

LABOUR || No shortage of entry level work

It's not just the service industry that's desperate for workers

DEREK SPALDING DAILY NEWS

Nanaimo has hundreds of jobs available to anyone who's looking. From retail outlets to the construction sites, there's opportunity for just about everyone.

Restaurant owners have often had difficulty finding quality cooks, but the search for long-term employees has spread outside the hospitality industry. Fast-food restaurants throughout the Harbour City have "help wanted" signs posted in windows and attached to roadside menu signs.

Staff at Supporting Employment Transitions, one of the city's largest job banks, has had a busy summer teaching people to choose the right career paths, while teaching e-mail, Internet and resume skills to thousands of clients. The downtown location is a hub from which people can find just about any job in the city.

A bulletin board of at least 15 clipboards illustrates just how many industries job seekers have to choose from. Potential employees can find jobs in the trades, public service, health, hospitality, or just about anything they want.

"This summer there's more service industry and hospitality jobs than usual, but across the board we're seeing more jobs, which is a trend that we've seen for . . . the past year," said Sandra Bistriz, Supporting Employment Transitions director.

Pete Maltesen has had a "cook wanted" sign hung in the window at New York Style Pizza in the Old City Quarter for several months. Finding quality staff to fill the position has been a struggle, especially with fewer students enrolled at the culinary arts program at Vancouver Island University, according to Maltesen, who's also the chairman of the upper Vancouver Island chapter of the B.C. Restaurant and Food Services Association.

A booming trades industry has attracted many workers toward bigger paycheques, leaving restaurant owners to find staff. They could make the positions more lucrative, but then they would have to raise



Nanaimo Minute Men general manager Peggy Henwood has a fleet of trucks with no drivers to drive them. Her company is one of the many businesses in the city looking for workers. [GLENN OLSEN/DAILY NEWS]

the prices on the menu, and that's a move that could scare away their clientele.

"In North America, we don't charge enough for food," Maltesen said. "We're all afraid of the competition. I mean, I would love to pay a cook \$20 an hour, but I'd have to charge \$40 for a pizza."

The restaurant owner has stacks of resumes, but few have the qualifications, he explained. Similarly, managers from other companies are always looking with little luck for experienced staff.

Peggy Henwood has been hunting for a moving-truck driver since February – still nothing. The Nanaimo Minute Men general manager said she has gone through several people in the past six months.

"We're in an aging industry with nobody new coming into it," she said.

"Plus, not a lot of people think about becoming a mover."

The 60-year-old business offers training to drivers at the head office in Toronto, which can get expensive if the new hire leaves the job after three months.

Nanaimo also has difficulties keeping out-of-town students in the community for the summer, according to Steve Beasley, executive director for the VIU student union. Minimum wage jobs at fast-food restaurants provide little incentive for people to stay.

"There are a lot of jobs, but none that students can make a living at," he said. "People are going to their home communities to work. If you work for \$8 an hour, you better be living with Mom and Dad."

DSpalding@nanaimodailynews.com
250-729-4231