

**Local News**

**On job hunt, it's who you know**  
*Meet new contacts, reconnect with old colleagues, experts say*

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John Madill / H-P staff Steve Murray is a professional recruiter and owner of Express Employment Professionals in St. Joseph Township. April 9, 2009

**By KEVIN ALLEN - H-P Business Writer**

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Many people hunting for employment these days may feel compelled to spend hours upon hours scouring the Internet for openings.

But local experts say the best method for landing a job, especially in a recession, is to devote time to meeting new contacts and reconnecting with old colleagues.

Steve Murray, a professional recruiter and owner of Express Employment Professionals in St. Joseph Township, said searching for jobs online can be like looking for a needle in a haystack.

"There's still plenty of postings out there," Murray said, before adding, "The effectiveness of them from the jobseeker's perspective is very low. ... Overall, the only real effective way of getting a good job is through networking."

Eric Huggins, communications and technology lead for Michiana Career Network, a volunteer-run collection of jobseeker groups, echoed Murray's point.

The organization cites research from human-resources firm Lee Hecht Harrison that only 25

percent of jobs are filled from a pool of applicants and nearly 70 percent are filled by a candidate who the hiring manager knew before the job opening was publicized.

"What our members are experiencing is you fill out online applications and it goes into a black hole and you never hear anything about it again," Huggins said. "Our members that are getting responses from companies are networking."

#### Networking linked to better jobs

Candice Elders, director of community relations for Michigan Works! in Berrien, Cass and Van Buren counties, said the importance of networking sometimes depends on what type of job a person is pursuing.

"Anecdotally, we do find that a lot of the higher-skilled professional jobs are advertised by word of mouth and filled by people through their personal and professional networks," Elders said.

But overall, about 80 percent of the jobs Michigan Works! fills are advertised online in the agency's Michigan Talent Bank, Elders said.

Murray and Huggins said networking is especially important during a recession.

Huggins said tens of thousands of people can respond to an online job advertisement, leading many companies to skip the step of posting the opening because it takes too much time to sift through so many applications.

But effective networking often isn't easy. Murray and Huggins said jobseekers need to approach the task as if it is a job.

"You're talking about touching 200 to 300 contacts to build 10 to 15 interviews to build two to three potential job offers, and you just keep doing it until you find something that fits," Huggins said. "That's a lot more work than most people are willing to do these days."

Murray said jobseekers should make a list of everyone they know. Most people will realize they have more contacts than they might have thought, he said.

Next, they should develop and practice what Murray calls "an elevator speech" - a clear and concise way for a jobseeker to tell people about his or her work experience and what they want in terms of a job.

Huggins also encourages people to mail letters to companies in their career fields.

"Don't ask for a job, ask for networking opportunities," he said.

Networking can be more difficult in these times when people move so often, Elders said, and that is where the Web can be helpful.

"We're beginning to use social networking sites to connect area jobseekers with each other and to us," she said.

One site the agency has set up is [www.meetup.com/michiganworks](http://www.meetup.com/michiganworks), where members can connect and share tips about who is hiring. Huggins said [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com) is another effective networking Web site.

#### Volunteering helps

Michigan Works! also recommends that clients volunteer through the Volunteer Center of Southwest Michigan and join local organizations such as Rotary Club, Lions Club and Cornerstone Chamber of Commerce.

"That's a great way to get to know people who work in fields they're interested in," Elders said. "Even if it doesn't end up in a job, they still gain experience and contribute to their community."

Some people may feel embarrassed about being unemployed, but Elders said jobseekers should not keep their situations a secret.

"Let everybody know that you're looking. Don't be shy about it," she said.

"Just the emotional aspect of being out of a job is something people shouldn't keep to themselves," Elders explained. "The feeling of isolation can be self-destructive. We want

people to know they're not alone out there."

"Everyone in this economy knows somebody who's out of work. There's no stigma associated with looking, and people are very willing to help."

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