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## Michigan Works manager speaks to Rotary Club

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Whether it's providing workshops on polishing up a résumé or working directly with employers to provide on the job training, the men and women at Michigan Works have a single goal: to make sure that every Michigan resident can earn a living.

In an area so dramatically affected by the economic recession seven years ago like Cass County, the services the nonprofit organization provides to the unemployed or underserved are more needed than ever before.

One of the people helping to get people back to work is Chris Abel, the talent development manager at the Cass County branch of Michigan Works, located in Dowagiac. The Three Rivers resident discussed what services his company provides to residents with the members of the Dowagiac Rotary Club, during their weekly meeting Thursday afternoon at the Elks Club.

Michigan Works of Berrien, Cass and Van Buren counties is actually a division of Kinexus, a nonprofit organization that was spun out from the previous Michigan Works organization located in the tri-county area.

"We got into a lot of things that Michigan Works normally does not do, like business development as well as community development," Abel said. "When we were doing those things people were like, 'what is Michigan Works doing this?' So we kind of outgrew our name."

Even then, the division of the organization committed to getting people to work in the area remains stronger than ever.

The most common services Michigan Works provides are through its branch offices, located in Dowagiac, Benton Harbor and Paw Paw. The centers provide free access to computers and the Internet, which gives visitors the chance to complete a professional résumé or create an interest profile to match them with a prospective career field.

"Chances are you will only use the tip of the iceberg of the services we provide," Abel said.

Employees at the center also provide more extensive, long-term services for job seekers, many of which are federally or state funded. Perhaps the largest of these programs is the Workforce Investment Act program (WIA), where Works employees mentor perspective job seekers, teaching them crucial skills like interviewing and helping them personally during their job search.

"If they're not quite ready yet, if they need some additional training, we'll assist with that," Abel said. "Just for this last year, at Southwestern Michigan College, we put about \$80,000 into assistance for different participants in this program."

The organization also works with people before they hit the job force, with programs such as the Jobs for Michigan's Graduates program, which brings educators to high schools to provide job building skills with high risk teenagers. The program is already in place at Ross Beatty High School in Cassopolis, and Abel said that Kinexus hopes to bring this program to Dowagiac Union High School in the near future.

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