

Friday, July 29, 2022,

North Shore Career Center hits the road to find workers



SALEM — With an office in downtown Salem, and satellite locations in Gloucester and Lynn, the North Shore Career Center has always been available for people who need help looking for work. But in a time of record low unemployment and employers desperate for workers, the staff at the center has decided it can no longer wait for people to come to them.

The North Shore Career Center has launched a ‘Career Center on the Go’ initiative that will entail visiting the 19 cities and towns that it covers. Staff members will set up shop for a day in local libraries, town halls or Chamber of Commerce offices and offer the same services that are available at their Salem office.

So far the career center has been to the Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce in Gloucester, the Peabody Institute Library in Danvers, and the Abbot Public Library in Marblehead. About 30 people have attended the sessions, said Paul Ventresca, North Shore Career Center’s executive director.

“We all know people out there who can’t get here,” Ventresca said, referring to the Salem office. “They’re working or don’t have transportation or day care. We know there are folks out there that need to connect to us.”

The North Shore Career Center is one of 29 career centers in Massachusetts that operate under MassHire, a state program that also includes 16 local workforce boards. The center helps people find jobs and offers skills and educational training, career fairs and networking events.

Mary Sarris, executive director of the North Shore Workforce Board, said foot traffic has been slow at the career center as many people remain out of the job market, despite plenty of job openings.

“There are 250,000 job postings across Massachusetts and there are 150,000 people out of work,” Sarris said. “There’s a huge difference between job postings and the available labor force.”

Sarris cited several reasons for people sitting out the job market, from those reassessing their lives in the midst of the pandemic to others who can’t access affordable day care. Certain age groups, like 18-to-24 and 55-and-over, have been particularly reluctant to enter or get back into the workforce, she said.

“Many people in the more mature workforce have opted to retire at a younger age,” she said. “And many younger people are rethinking life. They are not making career decisions per se. They’re taking it slow, going from job to job just to earn some money and therefore opting out of any career development programs that we have.”

Sarris said the low unemployment numbers mean many people can find a job without the help of the career center. But some don’t have the right skill set for the jobs that are open, particularly in health care, information technology and the trades. Sarris said the North Shore Workforce Board has teamed up one employer to acquire a grant that will allow the company to hire people first and then provide training. Another grant would help pay for employees at another company to take college courses toward earning a degree.

Ventresca said five people who attended the “on the go” career centers so far are now meeting with career coaches regarding training. Four military veterans also connected with the center through the outreach events.

Sarris and Ventresca said they want to make the traveling centers a permanent part of their operation, with set schedules so that people become familiar with them.

“It’s a great time to be a worker,” Sarris said. “The workers kind of have an upper hand right now and you don’t see that often. The training is there. The jobs are there.

Now we just have to work really hard to get the people who left the workforce back into the workforce.”

Staff Writer Paul Leighton can be reached at 978-338-2535, by email at pleighton@salemnews.com, or on Twitter at [@heardinbeverly](https://twitter.com/heardinbeverly).

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