


## Oklahoma City job fairs draw hundreds

Market still tight, Oklahoma job seekers say

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Jobseekers lined up 15 deep in front of the Boeing table, the minute the doors opened to a free career fair Monday afternoon at Cox Convention Center.

Among the candidates were Ronald Black, 44, of Edmond, who's been looking for work since he was laid off the end of May; Mike Wright, 38, of Del City, who plans to retire from the Air Force at the end of this year; and Inisha Jones, 21, of Oklahoma City, who only recently started searching after staying home with her 1-year-old son since January when she lost her job at Williams-Sonoma call center in Oklahoma City.

Monday's fair, which was hosted by Dallas-based LocalCareerFairs.com and expected to draw some 300 registered participants, was among at least three recruitment events held across the metro this past week. The Clarion Hotel and Saddleback Inn also hosted fairs.

Cox exhibitors — including American Fidelity Assurance Co., the Oklahoma City Police Department, TCIM Services, Dish Network and the City National Bank and Trust Co. — on Monday said jobs are available. But jobseekers say they're hard to land.

“At this point, I'll basically take anything — salaried, hourly or minimal pay scale, and work my way up,” said Black, who said he for three and half years supervised a 20-employee distribution center in southwest Oklahoma City for Petra Industries, until the Edmond-based electronics company on May 27 laid off him and other middle managers.

Black said he previously worked five years as supervisor of a 100-employee distribution center in Marietta for Dollar Tree, from which Petra recruited him. At Petra, he earned \$77,000 annually, he said, and had received three consecutive “exceeds expectations” job performance reviews.

“I financially would have been in a lot of trouble if we'd owned versus rented,” Black, a married father of two young boys, said. His wife, who works as an assistant manager for Kohl's department store, now is carrying the health insurance benefits for their family, he said.

Despite their respective, extensive career experiences, Black and Wright, a deployment manager for the Air Force, believe their lack of bachelor's degrees is working against them. A Norman native, Black has no college education, while Wright, who grew up outside Pittsburgh, Penn., earned only an associate degree during his 20 years in the military.

"I've been on five or six different interviews for management positions in retail and insurance, and found nothing so far," said Wright, a new homeowner with a son who's a junior at Midwest City High School.

Meanwhile, The City National Bank and Trust Co., a family-owned 110-year-old Oklahoma bank with 34 branches in grocery stores and elsewhere, is seeking candidates with sales experience who want to work their way up, recruiter Tracy Davis said.

The bank, she said, has 29 openings for retail bankers in Enid, Ponca City, Bartlesville, Miami, Guthrie, Mustang and Shawnee. New hires, who will be required to prospect for new customers and sell services, are paid \$10 an hour, plus incentives, she said.

"We'll often have college students who work for us and then graduate and want to work in their fields of study," Davis said. "Or they come to us as college graduates and expect to make \$35,000 a year with no sales experience."

Ten minutes into Monday's fair, Shelly Prince, a recruiter for Wilmington, Del.-based TCIM Services, already had scheduled two interviews for telephone sales associates for the company's call center at 13431 N Broadway, where workers primarily handle third-party customer service calls for existing AT&T customers.

Associates, Prince said, start at \$8 an hour and advance to \$8.50 after 60 days and \$9 after 120 days. But she said they primarily work for bonuses and incentives.

Prince said she started as an associate and within a month "made well over \$18 an hour."

Joshua Giguere, human resources representative for Dish Network south of Denver, called the suitability of job candidates a "mixed bag. It's not just "Thanks for coming, you're hired,"" Giguere said. To see if they're qualified, he said, candidates first must go online and pass an assessment of their problem-solving, mathematics, people and other skills.

Dish Network has roughly 10 openings in Oklahoma City, 15 in Tulsa and five in Durant, he said. New hires start at \$13 an hour.

At American Fidelity, recruiters are seeking candidates for a variety of positions, from customer service representatives, who start at \$12 an hour and up; to upper-level accountants, who are paid \$45,000 annually; and \$60,000-a-year information technology professionals. "Fortunately, we're a conservative company, so our hiring has held steady through the recession," said Bev Wood, assistant vice president of talent management.

On Monday, Boeing had 12 openings, mostly for degreed or technical engineers, said Rochelle Elder of human resources. "We're getting some great candidates here in Oklahoma," she said, "and others who want to move to Oklahoma City from other places."

Elder said Boeing over the past year has added 100 jobs in the state, bringing its total in Oklahoma City to 846. Most days, she said, the aerospace company posts one to two new jobs, including not only engineers but also finance, business and planning analysts, and project managers/schedulers.

"The problem is getting the word out that we're here," Elder said. "Though we've been in the state more than 50 years, people think we're only a small group."



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