‘Show me the Workers’ comes to Minto

BY JAIME MYSLIK

HARRISTON - Wellington County has an unemployment rate of five per cent. While great for the population, for employers it means a limited pool of candidates to pull from when filling job vacancies.

“The federal government considers 5% perfect employment and we’ve been hovering 4.5 to 5%, so we’re better than perfect,” said Mark Granger, a Wellington County employment specialist at a resource fair called Show Me the Workers. “What that means is we’re not so perfect because you can’t fill those jobs.”

The Workforce Planning Board and LaunchIt Minto offered the resource fair this spring in Harriston to illustrate to employers different ways to find candidates to fill job vacancies.



From left: Tom Lusis of the County of Wellington’s talent attraction and economic development department, Faith Loft of 2nd Chance Employment Counselling Inc., Mark Granger of the County of Wellington’s employment coordination committee, Kelly Schaefer of the Career Education Council and Carol Simpson of the Workforce Planning Board Guelph Wellington.

MARK GRANGER

One challenge is that the 5% of the population who are unemployed likely have barriers to employment, Granger explained. They may not have a resume or not know how to write a resume. They may also have life circumstances that are preventing them from accessing work, training or education.

His job, he said, is to help employers overcome their concerns about new hires.

Not everyone is in a position to seek out new training or go back to school, so one of Granger’s questions is whether employers are willing to train candidates.

“Most of you would probably agree you’re here to hire a person,” he said. “None of us really hire a resume, a piece of paper.

“You’ll see that resume, and then you want to see the person so you’re trying to make that best fit.”

He said the key is to find a candidate who will fit within the business.

“Most of you will train your people whether you believe it or not ... you’ll be training over time because if they do something wrong you’re going to jump in and say ‘you did it wrong, and here’s how you have to do it,’” he said. “So maybe we should have done it up front.”

Granger continued that with the limited job pool, if employers turn down a candidate it likely means they’ll end up doing that job themselves for a period of time, which does not help them grow their business.

“We’re ... asking you to sort of let your guard down a little bit and don’t just look at that resume and analyze it for what you think matches the job description of what you’re looking for,” he said. “They have to have certain qualifications, no doubt about it, but are you willing to step up and help them?”

> Lots of your tax dollars are being spent on people going around promoting Canada as a really good destination for workers.
>
> - TOM LUSIS, WELLINGTON COUNTY TALENT ATTRACTION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

FAITH LOFT

Faith Loft from 2nd Chance Employment Counselling Inc. agreed.

“Sometimes employers can benefit from looking beyond potential candidates’ current skill sets and abilities and give people a chance that they normally wouldn’t look at,” she said. “We see people that ... don’t present well in interviews but once hired turn out to be long-lasting and reliable employees.

“Sometimes they’re nervous or they’re just not good with interview skills or even poor eye contact can prevent them from getting a job.”

TOM LUSIS

Another option for filling the labour gap is to look at the immigrant population and international students.

Tom Lusis from the Wellington County economic development department, said many employers of small- and medium-sized businesses overlook immigrants as a potential source of workers.

“Canada has actually been recruiting immigrants and workers for a very, very long time,” he said. “That’s still going on today.

“Lots of your tax dollars are being spent on people going around promoting Canada as a really good destination for workers.”

Lusis said there are numerous immigration programs for various sectors of the economy, including agriculture, skilled trades, professionals and labourers.

Some programs are permanent and some are temporary.

"In terms of the time frame, this is a little bit intimidating for employers because immigration programs, they're not a quick and easy fix and typically the time frames are going to be between three and six months because ... there's processes that you have to go through," he said.

Employers are expected to pay an application fee and provide housing and transportation for temporary foreign workers, but Lusis said there are no costs associated with the permanent program. However, employers do have to go through a labour market assessment to prove to the Canadian government that they looked locally for a candidate.

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> CAROL SIMPSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WORKFORCE PLANNING BOARD GUELPH WELLINGTON

He advises employers recruiting international candidates that it's not their responsibility to help the employee settle into the community.

"I think sometimes when employers are thinking about immigration it gets a little bit intimidating to think 'okay I'm going to bring somebody from the other side of the world and I'm going to be on the hook to help them integrate,'" he said, adding county settlement workers and other agencies can help welcome the newcomer.

Talking to county settlement workers can also provide employers access to permanent residents who may not understand the labour market and may not even know the job is available. An example is international students.

"Employers are often hesitant to hire international students because they think that ... they're going to go back to their home countries but the reality is that ... I would say the vast, vast, vast majority of students are looking to settle in Canada," Lusis said.

"Giving them a job is ... the first step of integration and frankly, having worked with international students, there's a productive energy and a drive that is ... really worth thinking about.

"They bring an energy and a vibrancy that, as an employer, if I had a business I would hire international students because ... they're risk takers."

Lusis said they can't fall back on their parents because their families did so much to get them to Canada.

"They're looking to succeed and those are the types of workers, at least if I owned a business, I'd be looking to have them," he said.

Lusis also recommended businesses have websites stating their current employment opportunities.

"If you have ... a website you should have a career page on there where ... if someone was interested in learning more about working for you, what does that career page say? What are your workplace values? What's important to this workplace? What are any worker perks?"

He also suggested employers use social media as a recruitment tool.

CAROL SIMPSON

Carol Simpson, executive director of the Workforce Planning Board Guelph Wellington, explained her organization.

"Our main function is to keep track of what's happening in the local labour market from a supply and demand perspective so that we can understand what employers' needs are from a worker perspective, from a skilled perspective," she said. "And then we can share that information with educators, trainers, colleges, universities, etcetera to try and make sure that we can match that supply and demand."

She also encouraged employers to complete an Employer One survey in January to highlight their individual concerns and challenges

KELLY SCHAEFER

Career Education Council executive director Kelly Schaefer spoke about initiatives to expose students to different career paths and connect them with potential employers at a young age to help shape their education.

In total there were 17 organizations represented at the Show Me the Workers event. Attendees had time to walk around before and after the panel discussion to talk about their own individual circumstances.

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PHOTO: JAIME MYSLIK

Local jeweller writing instruction book on unique casting process

FERGUS - Artist and jeweller Tony DeLuca is sharing his expertise in an upcoming book on cuttlefish or cuttlebone casting.

The book will highlight techniques and skills involved with the artform, which DeLuca has been practising for years, making striking and unique jewelery pieces.

Cuttlefish casting uses moulds carved from cuttlefish bones, to cast pieces of jewellery with a unique wood grain texture. Jewelery books and courses offer little information on the process, beyond an introduction, and DeLuca hopes to remedy that with an instruction manual specifically on cuttlefish casting.

Tentatively titled *Cuttlebone Casting with Confidence*, the book "will teach you everything you need to know to be good at the technique," he said. Using descriptions, drawings and step-by-step photographs, the book will go through the entire process of creating a piece from initial drawings to the finished product.

He believes it will be the first book devoted entirely to cuttlebone casting, and is targeting it at students, professionals who want to learn more about the technique and those interesting in trying it out.

"Even for those who already know how, I can almost guarantee this book will make your casting better," he said.

A jeweller and goldsmith for over 20 years, DeLuca now operates About Face Jewellery, a studio space in Fergus where he designs and creates pieces for a variety of shows and a collection of clients.

Focusing on platinum, silver and gold, with precious and semi-precious stones, he has become a specialist in the use of cuttlebone casting, braiding and fabrication using traditional goldsmithing techniques as well as modern techniques.

Now teaching jewelry at Georgian College, he also offers various courses through the Fergus studio, including cuttlebone casting.

The book is being funded by a Kickstarter campaign that ran in April and May.