

Trumbull's Business & Career Resource Center is Open to All Job Seekers and Business People

by MEG BARONE

Place the words 'job search' in an Internet search engine and almost 250 million website results pop up; an unwieldy number that would be impossible to sort through. But even a more refined search that includes particulars on a specific job or field yields results probably too numerous to sift through for those who are seeking employment.

Thousands of resources exist to help the unemployed and underemployed find work. The Town of Trumbull has compiled all of those resources, and then some, under one roof at the Trumbull Public Library, 33 Quality Street. Despite its location, the resources are available to anyone who walks through the library doors; although there are some online data bases that require a Trumbull library card to access information from home or office computers.

According to the town's website, the Business and Career Resource Center "is both a physical place located in the Trumbull Library, and a virtual space with hundreds of links and resources at your fingertips." The center can provide information to help people start and manage a business, finance a business, market a business, research industries, companies, and trends, train their workforce, find a job, enhance a career, find chambers or business and trade organizations, connect with networking opportunities, prepare for employment-related tests, obtain a license, patent, or trademark, get legal and tax assistance or information, and find an internship.

"It's a gem of a resource. The beauty of it is it's all in one place," said Deborah Cox, Trumbull's economic development director. "It's for anybody who is in the workforce or has a business. It's to help them find resources more quickly, and resources they didn't even know they had available to them. It's been phenomenal, especially in this economy," said Cox, the person who assembled the team that forms the center's

partnership.

The center is marketed this way on the town's website: "Come in and get personal guidance from an expert librarian. How cool is that?! Save hundreds of dollars, and hours of time." The library also has 12 computers for public use, including job search.

Originally, the center was created as a business tool when it opened one year ago but the word career was added to the name when town officials and business leaders realized the extent of job loss due to the economy.

It employs knowledgeable business resource librarians, Linda Panovich and Walter Dembowski, to help navigate that wealth of information to help find a job, change a career, upgrade skills, start, manage, and grow a business and career, save time, make or save money. It includes books, magazines, databases, videos, forms, guides, tools, sample documents, links to hundreds of websites, and provides free lectures, workshops, webinars, and events on related topics.

"It's valuable because it is provided at no cost, it is able to bring together a great deal of information that most people would be totally unaware of, and can specifically guide one in finding an answer to a particular question that an individual might have," said John Annick, a retired business executive from General Electric, who now serves as co-chairman of Trumbull's Business Education Initiative and executive director of the BEI Foundation. "Here's a resource where there is a face, there is a body, who can react to your questions rather than just a computer which is faceless," Annick said.

"In the past, you probably could easily find a position or start a business on your own by looking in the newspaper or contacting an agency but now jobs are at such a premium and there are so few that you want to be able to hone in directly on where the opportunity may be. The center can provide many pieces of advice that would help you be the individual that might be able to obtain that job. Before there were lots of jobs so you might have got it without trying to differentiate your capabilities and skills. Now you absolutely need to do so and this center helps dramatically," Annick said.

It began with the creation of a Business Task Force in 2008 as a means of allowing various organizations to know what each of them are doing by way of job growth. The task force includes the Trumbull Economic Development Council, public library, Trumbull Chamber of Commerce, Bridgeport Regional Business Council, SCORE (a non-profit organization that does business consulting) the Business Education Institute, and other community organizations.

"The idea was to create a cooperative venture that would provide assistance to job seekers and business people. The more the better. That's the way we look at it. We all cross-refer each other. We wanted to build these alliances to make what is already out there more visible," said Linda Panovich, a reference librarian who has business experience in private industry. "That (experience) does help in terms of terminology and understanding what people are talking about and what they need," she said.

"We put information forward for people so they can find it. We're not going to reinvent or duplicate things that other state agencies (like the Connecticut Department of Labor) or other organizations are doing, but we're going to point out what they're doing for the public so it becomes more apparent, so we're helping people find it," Panovich said. "We will refer them to those places and we will have those things listed. We have basic reference tools and other databases, not just websites," she said. "We have added some career-specific databases so you can tailor your job search," Panovich said. One, called Job Now, actually offers live help.

Other databases available include Skill Proof, Career Transitions and Business USA. "We continuously update the online resources," Cox said.

Skill Proof, a new database, basically takes job requirements and openings from many companies, summarizes them and develops an array of skills that a business is looking for. The job seeker can check this database to see what skills a particular job requires and if they qualify or need to improve their skill level, Annick said.

Some of those databases help people find jobs, sales leads, companies, competitors, and answers to business issues. "If you boil it all down to what a library is supposed

to do, it's supposed to be finding information for people and making it available to people," Panovich. "We don't want it to be just books on the shelves because then it's just a warehouse and the books go out of date really quickly. We want it to be people - and there are several reference librarians here, two full time, that can help you find what you really need precisely, but also point you to things that other people are doing that will help you," she said.

People can come to the library or they can sit at home or in their workplaces to access some online databases that the library subscribes to. Cox said large companies use the databases to do market research and create sales leads. "Career seekers can do the same kind of thing," she said.

The databases contain information on companies nationwide so job seekers can look for employment close to home or in a distant state, she said.

Through the Business and Career Resource Center, the library has expanded its offerings to businesses and individuals by hosting many business and career workshops, such as those presented by SCORE, the Small Business Administration, the state Department of Labor and individual business experts, Cox said. Past lecture topics have included organizing your time, keeping spirits up while job seeking in a tough economy, interview skills, where the jobs are. Coming up in the next few months are more career development workshops on the second Tuesday of each month: Advanced Resume Writing on Feb. 9, Interview Skills on Mar. 9, You Do



Have Experience, which will review people's untapped and transferable skills, on April. 13, and Online Resumes and Job Applications on May 11.

Throughout the year the library plans to host other lectures and programs related to job search and career development on topics such as why franchising is a good idea in a bad economy, business basics, and getting financial help to launch a business. Coming up sometime this year will be a workshop on writing a business plan. Additionally, the state Dept. of Labor Career Bus is tentatively scheduled to visit the Trumbull Library in June. Check the website for more details.

Those who are unable to attend may still review the lectures. Annick said the presentations are taped and broadcasted on the Trumbull educational public access television channel. A copy also stays at the library so that anyone who is unable to attend the original lecture or presentation may go to the library and watch it.

Overall, the Business and Career Resource Center is an important job search tool.

"It is serving as a place for people who are interested in job search and new business to come in and talk to one of the library specialists who can direct them to information or databases and they can guide them to an individual or organization that can help them," Annick said.

There is another intangible value that the center provides, according to Paska Nayden, owner of The Entrepreneurs' Source in Easton. "The value is to give people hope, opportunities, education and support. It's about the new career economy, showing them the possibilities, and letting them know they can build their own plan," said Nayden, who has lectured on business issues at the library.

The Business and Career Resource Center can be accessed through the website www.trumbullresource.com, or through the town's and library's websites, at www.trumbull-ct.gov and www.trumbullct-library.org, respectively.