

The dream job isn't as far away as you think

By Maclean Kay, Troy Media

Caroline Fairbrother doesn't have to look far to find an example of someone who used a career show to successfully change careers.

"My son Ben was a professional football player with the Saskatchewan Roughriders and BC Lions; now he sells internal prostheses," Fairbrother, Alberta Employment and Immigration's regional director for Calgary, said.

While not all examples are as dramatic as Ben Fairbrother, he's far from unique. Career shows are a good place to find a job, but they're not *just* that. They offer individuals who are considering or even just dreaming of a vastly different vocation an opportunity to explore the possibilities. They can network and do some research into how to go about changing careers – like Ben Fairbrother did.

"He had a degree in physical education and, like a lot of professional athletes, is very goal-oriented," his sister said. "He discovered his new career from information interviews at a career fair. Career fairs are great for that – everyone's in one place. If you're looking for change, that's where to find it."

According to Arif Ansari, coordinator of Bow Valley College's BVC Works program, it is well worth attending career shows even if certain industries aren't hiring. BVC Works helps people acquire the skills needed to upgrade their jobs.

First, Ansari said, the job market isn't barren as people think. While some industries remain slow, others are still experiencing shortfalls.

Alberta Employment's Fairbrother agrees. "Employers are still hiring, and there are lots of 'good pockets' of industries looking for people. Employers are still coming to us regularly to (help them) recruit."

"It's kind of a weird market; it's not like a general downturn. It's very easy to succumb to doom and gloom, but the last downturn was far more widespread," she added. She pointed to warehousing, manufacturing, and hospitality as industries currently searching for employees.

"There's (also) huge demand in health care right now, for example," Ansari added.

Second, there will be plenty of opportunity to secure that dream job in the very near future. Even companies that have been laying staff off recently will need to hire very soon. A surprising number of industries are facing a demographic crunch, as a disproportionate numbers of employees, managers and executives will soon be retiring.

“The economy changed, but demographics haven’t,” Ansari said. “There’s a mass exodus (from the workforce) coming in the next five to 10 years.” Provincial government studies indicate southern Alberta will face a particularly dire shortage of skilled workers, he added even more so than the previous labour shortage.

With that in mind, Ansari said this is a great time for people to do two things: network, and upgrade their skills, whether they are currently employed or not.

Heather Douglas, president and CEO of the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, stressed the beneficial effects of ongoing networking and additional training. “In Calgary, it’s not what you know, but who,” she said. “This city revolves around relationships – even if (an applicant) doesn’t fill a company’s specific need, he or she will get mentioned to (human resources) people in other companies.”

And “career shows are the best way to talk to employers about availability and the necessary skills,” according to Fairbrother. “It’s all about information collecting.”

Besides networking, upgrade training is also necessary, and career shows are one of the best places to obtain or upgrade skills, she added.

“The Chamber” Douglas said, “hosts seminars (at The Calgary Career Show) on all sorts of useful things like resume writing techniques, interviewing, marketing your talents via social media, and others.” The Chamber is one of The Career Show’s sponsors.

Job seekers are also recognizing the need to continually upgrade their skills, if post-secondary institution enrolment is any indication.

“People have been turning to (Bow Valley College) in record numbers – we just had our largest enrolment ever,” Ansari said. He credits the jump in enrolment to people seeking better and more rewarding careers.

Finally, recent predictions that Alberta’s mini-recession is just about over will soon mean the demand for workers will return.

“Take natural gas, just as one example,” Douglas said. “It’s almost October. If this is a cold winter, the price of natural gas may very well double from what it’s trading at today. If that happens, we’ll be caught in another labour shortage. Everyone will be hiring again, from the oil and gas companies down to city transit and the police.”

So are career or trade shows worth attending, even if you don’t think you’ll get hired? Caroline Fairbrother’s son wasn’t expecting much when he attended, but he got exactly what he most wanted – a profitable and interesting post-football career, which allowed him to use his strengths while still offering an interesting challenge.

“He’s very happy,” says Fairbrother. A mother would know.

Turn your dreams into a great new career on October 30 and 31st, 2009 at the Career Show. From 10 am until 5 pm on Friday and 10 am until 4 pm on Saturday, you can interact with post secondary institutes, business and associations from Calgary and throughout Western Canada. This is your chance to introduce yourself, ask questions and gather the information you need to decide your next best career step. See www.thecareershow.ca for more information and exhibitor registration information.

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