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Unemployed? DuPage Township can help you

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Since the start of the recession in December 2007, the United States Bureau for Labor Statistics released data stating unemployment increased 4.6 percent to a whopping 9.5 percent, which roughly relates to 14.7 million out-of-work citizens.

Mid-July, the Chicago Sun-Times reported that Illinois (at 10.3 percent) continued to exceed the national statistics as the state lost 272,600 jobs over the year and recorded consecutive losses for the past nine months.

In Will County, the situation is far worse. According to the Will County Watcher (an online newsletter out of Joliet) the county unemployment hit 19.7 percent, up from 7.6 percent a year ago. Regional statistics and their impact on residents are being closely monitored by DuPage Township. For the past year, Township Supervisor Bill Mayer and the board of trustees have instituted a number of programs like a job fair (this past October) to respond to the deteriorating trends.

Maureen Fox, DuPage Township Administrator, says, "We are the front line. We're seeing every aspect of the economic crisis and seeing the disadvantaged. This economy has hit middle America. We are now having people walk through our doors that just have been out of jobs for a while. We're seeing increases in requests for all our services. It's not just people out of work, it's people who can't keep up with costs. They need to subsidize and shopping at Aldi just isn't doing it.

"They are coming here. We've seen so many new faces this year. Just this month we served 1,500 people (500 more than last year). It's challenging, yet we have competent staff that aren't afraid of being overwhelmed dedicated to meeting those needs. We have our finger on the pulse and we are constantly asking ourselves, what else can we offer? ... What's next? Finding the solutions and management support new programs that really help people is one of the reasons this job is so rewarding."

To address the needs of the unemployed and underemployed, DuPage Township's credit counselor Linda Youngs' response has expanded. Youngs comments, "I'm the one you see when you're facing foreclosure. To put it into perspective, there are 24,000 in Bolingbrook and less than 5 percent are having issues. The problem is most people wait until they're almost losing their homes. We can help but people gotta understand home mortgage assistance is a process. They need to come in as soon as they know they're in trouble. The more time we have the better chance we have of getting to the root of the problem and saving the house."

In doing the work to get to the root of the problem, Youngs found a common denominator. Job losses were the overwhelming reason people were losing their homes. Youngs adds, "Pride is the real reason people don't want to come in and talk about their problems. They leave the pride outside. There is nothing wrong with accepting help when you need it. The situation that is in front of them is by ignoring it; it's only gonna get worse.

"So we start at point A and talk about their skills and background and education. We help people to see their future isn't hopeless. We help them see the situation they're in isn't permanent. We have many resources here at the township for their use, like a computer lab and access to a database. We help them to work with other agencies and we're planning another job fair.

"That's one of the reasons we sent out a newsletter. We want people to use the services that they've already paid 1 percent for. We're here for the people and a lot of people still don't know we're here. We're like the best hidden secret in Bolingbrook!"

The newest project being launched by the township is the Job Resource Center. It is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The only requirements are that interested individuals be residents within the DuPage Township service area and pre-register at 630-759-1317.

Areas covered include job development, Internet job search and money management. Together these areas encompass even resume preparation, electronic job search, interview workshops, finance for families, preparing a monthly budget and balance.

The township has even compiled a list of 23 employment agencies with offices established in Bolingbrook for resident use. I maintain contact with each office and its representatives to further help clients understand when and how to utilize the services to their advantage.

If you are considering using the township's services, you should allow two to three hours for intake and evaluation. It is also important that you can't help you if you're not willing to commit time to answering tough questions about yourself honestly and putting yourself in a secure gainful employment. If this is something you feel you might benefit from, I urge you to make the call to Youngs today.

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