

EMPLOYMENT
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Employment

'Hire-A-Youth' Puts Local Teens To Work

YOUNG PEOPLE ages 16 to 21 in Santa Cruz suffer an unemployment rate of 14 percent. In Watsonville the job market is even more dismal, with 20 percent of young people out of work.

Hire a Youth '87 hopes to put a dent in those statistics by finding work for at least 1,000 local youths this summer. As part of that drive, May has been declared "Hire-a-Youth" month.

"Last year we weren't as organized or had as much funding and we still managed to find jobs for 720 kids," said Brandy Martin, coordinator of the employment development department aspect of the program. "This year we expect to do even better. We have modeled the program after the ones in Santa Clara and San Diego counties, and there is a lot of work to do."

A new program, Hire a Youth is jointly sponsored by the federally funded Santa Cruz County private industry council, the federal job training and partnership act, and the state's employment development department.

Besides flooding the media, organizers have sent out 5,100 letters to area businesses and will conduct a phone blitz next week. The program has also received donations from several local companies, most notably Plantronics, Inc.

"We're attempting to find jobs beyond just the traditional fast food restaurants," said Alan Knox, service coordinator of the jobs training and partnership act, a down-scaled version of the defunct CETA program. "The kids are motivated. More than 200 showed up last Saturday for registration and a workshop. Many have clerical and computer-related skills."

By coincidence, it happens that May 3-9 is also "Hire a Veteran Week" nationwide. Here in Santa Cruz, the Department of Labor employs two full-time workers working year-round to combat the high veteran unemployment that exists locally.

According to last year's estimates, 20-25 percent of the county's 9,000 Vietnam vets were without a job, along with 15-20 percent of all 25,000 local vets. In addition, 30 percent of disabled veterans have no job.

Rick Deraiche, the local veteran employment representative, notes that he and disabled vet representative Joe Splane find jobs for 20 veterans in an average month (17 able-bodied, 3 disabled). They are aided by a recently refunded jobs bill that allows for the Veterans Administration to pay half the wages for Vietnam and Korean veterans.

—Kevin Hanson