ONE YEAR AFTER FINISHING COLLEGE ...  

Grads put to test in job hunt

By HOWARD BUCK
Columbian staff writer

N asian Ginsby saw it coming. 
Midway through a career-changing two-year sprint to complete Clark College's radiography program, the Vancouver man watched his job market turn on its head.

He was destined to be one of Clark's inaugural group of 14 medical imaging graduates, come June 2009. Across town, Portland Community College had pumped up jobs in its red-hot program from 35 to 50 students each quarter.

But the region's economy had plunged into free-fall. Hospitals either shed staff or ordered a hiring freeze. Workers clung tight to their jobs and movement ceased, leaving lean pickings for newcomers.

"There was an extreme need about five years ago," said Ginsby, 36, a father of two. "Hospitals had sign-on bonuses, signed people from out of state."

Then came the glut of local candidates. "It just kind of floored the market. The problem is, there's just so many people looking that have experience," he said.

It's a familiar refrain for 2009 graduates of Clark College and Washington State University Vancouver. They ran smack into the worst job downturn in half a century, in one of nation's highest unemployment zones. And found them selves scraping with competitors plenty of work history.

Take a look at the chart at right. Can you think of a worse year in which to graduate?

One year later, several hundred local graduates have scrambled to stay afloat. The fortunate ones found a desired job in their chosen field. Many have plugged together part-time shifts, lidding their time for permanent work. Others plug along in make-do gigs, diggling and praying for that one promising call-back.

Edie Blakley, career counseling director at Clark College, said it's easily

Graduates. Page A4
Survivor' jobs

Graduates are playing two titles: finding jobs or continuing in four-year colleges. They say, "So far, so good." They are often relatively stable at fields of work. A majority of them are in non-Latino white-collar jobs, but they have yet to see their future. We are advising them to at least take "survivor" jobs that give them transferrable skills, whether it's working or volunteering. Still, they express fears, "We build our resumes, but can't control our futures. It's hard to find the right one."".

New 'ball game'

In downtown Portland, Amy Hussey is gone for a second fall. For almost a year, she's handed out flyers for a small legal aid clinic. She's found that education in English and speech therapy to college students is crucial.

Despite perfect grades at WOU and a sharp determination to get her degree in English and political science, the 2009 student of the year has had a difficult time getting a job. She has tried in several different fields, but despite her efforts, she has found it difficult to transition from the skills she learned in college.

"I've been had many acquaintances," she says, "Most of them have been very difficult to find employment in current fields." She emphasizes the need for more resources and networking opportunities for recent graduates.

"I have a lot of work to do," she says, "I'm not going to give up, either." Still, she adds, "I believe that in order to be successful, you have to keep working hard and not giving up on your goals."

College degree still helps job prospects

Despite the gloomy job picture, there's enough evidence to show that a college degree is still valuable in the job market. According to the latest data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 14.5 percent of individuals with less than a bachelor's degree are unemployed, while 10.3 percent of individuals with a college degree or some college are unemployed. Overall, 4.3 percent of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher are unemployed.

He has since taken a part-time position in another field, and has found a new job at his old firm. He says, "I'm not giving up, I'll be back on my feet in no time."

Inside track

Location was never a question for Rachel Mier, now a student at University of Oregon. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in social work and is currently a social worker at a local non-profit organization.

After graduating with minors in psychology and human resources, she entered into the field of social work. She says, "It's a lot easier to apply for jobs that relate to my degree, such as social work, compared to other fields."

She has also used her degree to launch a human resources post in the state Department of Transportation. She was able to use her degree to land a job, but before a departmental hiring freeze kicked in, she was able to secure a new position with the state's new "right-to-work" policy. She says, "I proved that you can do both a new degree and land a job at the same time."

"I think I'm one of the only ones from my program who's working so much," she says. "I've landed my dream job, and I've used my degree in ways that I never expected." Still, she adds, "I'm not worried about not having a job."

No surrender

Goby, the quintessential radiology technician,Queen of the Neighborhood

He's surviving, working on odd shifts at Washington Adventist Hospital. "I'd rather work at a hospital," he says, "I can work on my own time and take care of my clients, but it's been tough." He says, "I've had to take on more responsibilities, such as the work of a general practitioner, but I've been able to handle it by working hard and staying dedicated." He adds, "I've learned that hard work and dedication are key to success in the medical field." Still, he says, "I'm not giving up, I'll be back on my feet in no time."