

unstuck

To learn more about the series, visit [columbian.com/unstuck](http://columbian.com/unstuck). The Web site features additional resources for coping with the difficult economy, learning tools and video. To join an ongoing conversation about how to get unstuck, go to [columbian.com/unstuck/blog](http://columbian.com/unstuck/blog).

# Reality Check

We follow up on the progress of families striving to get their lives in order

**E**arlier this year we invited readers to tell us about the problems that left them feeling stuck in today's faltering economy.

After listening to roughly 75 stories, we picked four whose problems represent the same struggles facing many Southwest Washington families. We then paired these four Clark County residents with experts who could see through the obstacles and share solutions grounded in today's realities. The stories about their journeys and

the expert advice they received appeared in The Columbian in May.

As part of the project, The Columbian has followed up with the four to see how they fared months later. We will tell their stories in a two-part series.

■ **Sunday:** Supporting a family after job loss derails the primary breadwinner, and making plans to retire with a diminished nest egg.

■ **Today:** Landing a first job in your chosen field, and starting over as a single parent.



STEVEN LANE/Columbian files

Missy Desgrosellier, now Missy Bachmeier, was trying to land a job in marketing. She's now decided to focus on building her own photography company, Take 5.

## Her marketing hopes take a hit

Missy Bachmeier has a new last name and adopts a new strategy

By **MATT WASTRADOWSKI**  
Columbian staff writer

**Where she was then:** Missy Desgrosellier — now Missy Bachmeier — worked at a series of jobs after graduating from college but hadn't been able to break into her chosen career of marketing.

Earlier this year, she was working as a sales resource representative for Hewlett-Packard Co. in Vancouver, where she processed invoices.

In her spare time, Bachmeier ran her own company, Take 5 Photography. Bachmeier's long-term goal was to turn Take 5 into a full-time job, but in the meantime, she was looking for jobs that would give her more marketing experience.

She wanted to stand out to potential employers but wasn't sure how. She was also concerned that employers might see Take 5 on her résumé and raise concerns about it competing for her time.

Bachmeier was hired as a marketing specialist for



**Eric Schubert**  
Express  
Employment  
Professionals

MISSY, Page D3

## Jennifer Fendley found the going tough

By **MATT WASTRADOWSKI**  
Columbian staff writer

**Where she was then:** Jennifer Fendley, 33, was sharing a room with her daughter in her mother's home after separating from her husband in 2007. She had just completed the four-week Southwest Washington Displaced Homemaker Program at Clark College, which helps divorced or widowed homemakers get back into the work force. Fendley was looking for work and planning to take classes to become a pharmacy tech at Clark College. Fendley was also working to get on solid financial footing, move into her own apartment and buy a



**Becky Merritt**  
Southwest  
Washington  
Displaced  
Homemaker  
Program

JENNIFER, Page D3





STEVEN LANE/Columbian files

Jennifer Fendley and her daughter, Tabitha, 8, here April 24, was sharing a small room in Jennifer's mother's house. She has since moved to California.

## Jennifer:

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car. She was "97 percent sure" that she wanted to divorce her husband, who was in California with their son, but she hadn't started the legal proceedings, due in part to the cost.

**Where she is now:** Fendley's mother, Colleen Campbell, said that her daughter moved back to California in early September to reunite her family. Campbell said that Fendley was more concerned with reuniting her family than with reconciling with her husband.

Fendley was working on going back to school to become a pharmacy tech, but hadn't begun classes. She instead took a part-time retail position, Campbell said.

Fendley did not return repeated calls seeking an interview for this story.

**Experts weigh in:** While most women in Clark College's displaced homemaker class continue their education, it takes some several tries to complete a course of study, said Becky Merritt, who runs the program. Of the 21 women in the summer class, 16 enrolled for Clark's fall quarter, Merritt said.

Finding a job is tough for any-

one, but especially for women whose marriages have broken up.

"It's a little different to say my whole life is falling apart," Merritt said. "We have all had a few false starts in our lives. There's nothing wrong with that. ... Often I'll hear from people I saw two, three, six years ago, and they'll come back."

She said sometimes it just takes another try.

"Maybe it's because it wasn't the right time for school because too many other things were going on," Merritt said. "Even if the plan doesn't work out now, the next time, the person will have more information than they did the first time, and be able to pick up where they left off."

Merritt suggests starting off slow.

"Take one class at a time for now. It moves you forward in your goal to improve your job skills, but doesn't make it overwhelming," Merritt said. "Get to know your new routine, learn how to 'go to school' — how to find time to study, ... how to get to school when the car breaks down."

If a displaced homemaker has to duck out of college courses for a while, Merritt suggests keeping in touch with an adviser so she'll always have an advocate on campus.

## Missy:

From Page D1

Northwest Ideal Properties, a Vancouver real estate company, shortly after consulting with our job search experts.

Bachmeier hoped that job would build her marketing and photography skills. She was also hopeful that she'd be able to still run her photography company on a part-time basis.

**Where she is now:** Bachmeier left the job with Northwest Ideal Properties. She learned that she preferred more of a hands-off management approach and that she didn't enjoy working in a home office, so she left in July. Since then, she has worked full time on building Take 5 and has relied on that for her primary income. Take 5

was hired for several weddings during the summer. As the wedding season has tapered off, Bachmeier is focusing on marketing her photography services to families and professionals who need portraits for their work.

**What tips worked:** Bachmeier had been worried about mentioning that she was running her own photography business as she was interviewing for full-time jobs. She didn't want potential employers to worry that she would be distracted. Eric Schubert, owner of Express Employment Professionals in Vancouver, told Bachmeier to make it clear that she only worked at Take 5 on the weekends and that it would not interfere with her work week.

Bachmeier did that and went one step further, explaining that her experience with Take 5 helped develop her professional

skills. Bachmeier believes that helped her land the job at Northwest Ideal Properties.

**What's next:** Bachmeier is considering looking for a part-time position this winter to supplement her income from Take 5, but hasn't made any firm decisions yet.

**Experts weigh in:** One of Schubert's tips for job-seekers is to create a five-year plan that breaks down a larger career goal into smaller steps. The sagging economy doesn't change the effectiveness of that strategy, Schubert said. But he advises patience. "Your five-year plan is still there, but you might need to extend certain

parts of your plan," he said.

Schubert said knowing when not to make a change is also important. Given the job market is tight right now, staying put can be good idea even if it doesn't feel like progress.

"If you have a job, keep it, unless something totally crazy is going on," he said.

Rather than focusing on making a move, Schubert advises job-seekers to invest time and effort into building the skills that will earn them a promotion or a new job when the market improves.

"Use this time to hone up on the skills that maybe are lacking a little bit," he said.