

SEIZE THE MOMENT

Out of work? Instead of waiting for a miracle, get aggressive about a new career

If you're among the approximately 13 percent of Clark County workers who are unemployed, there are two basic strategies from which to choose:

■ See yourself and your government as two problems. You're out of work, and your government is notoriously slow to react. Hunker down and pray that the long haul somehow — miraculously — becomes a short haul. Wait for the economy to recover, and then for the job market to improve in your chosen field so that you can go back to work. Try to make ends meet with your unemployment check and your rapidly evaporating savings, and wait for something good to happen.

■ See yourself and your government as two solutions. You've got the energy and the capacity to learn. Your government provides plenty of educational opportunities to make that happen. Get aggressive about a second career, perhaps one that will even be more enjoyable. Make this whole project a full-time job, of sorts, albeit one that costs money instead of making money. Don't wait for the economy to recover. Create your own marketability.

Do yourself a favor: Take the second approach. It's not an easy one, but it's more exciting. People who are unemployed deserve sympathy, but the wise and aggressive ones also will gain admiration for tackling the problem head-on.

If you adopt the second strategy, you'll have plenty of company, much of it at Clark College. The local institution is experiencing record enrollment growth. Summer enrollment is up 37 percent from a year ago. Fall enrollment is proceeding at more than 50 percent of the pace shown last year.

As Howard Buck reported recently in *The Columbian*, many of these Clark College students are middle-age career changers and

layoff victims. Lori Bienten, 44, has worked more than a quarter of a century in the hair-care business, but now she's seriously considering nursing, a high-demand field that will become even more in demand as more baby boomers become seniors.

Sandy Petta and Bernerdita Ines, each over 50, want more stable employment than working at the printer plant where they were laid off. Petta is considering the medical billing and collections field. Ines is headed into Clark's culinary arts program to study baking

because "I want to have some fun."

Good for all four of them. Seize the moment!

Clark College certainly is doing its part to handle the influx of new students. The Clark Center will open in September at

Columbia Tech Center with room for about 400 full-time-equivalent students (those taking 15 or more credit hours). More than 50 part-time adjunct instructors have been added. For the 10-week summer session, 71 new class sections were created, and 119 new ones are expected for the fall. More classes will start early, as early as 7 a.m. Late-afternoon and evening classes are being added.

The Running Start program — high school students earning tuition-free college credits — has grown 63 percent in one year. These students and their parents are motivated by more than just the advantage of getting a head start. They're eager to accumulate credits before tuition increases of 7 percent (for two-year colleges, in each of the next two years) kick in. Clark leaders wisely see this record growth as cyclical. That's why the faculty increase is largely part-time or adjunct.

Granted, joblessness is no walk in the park. But if the right strategy is pursued aggressively, it could be a springboard to something new, exciting and lucrative.

Agree? Disagree?

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