



At Hunts Point center, jobs are Job 1

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On a typical orientation day at the Workforce 1 Career Center in Hunts Point, at least 30 “customers,” as they are called, pack into a classroom at the office on East 163rd Street and Southern Boulevard. They come from different backgrounds—some without a high school diploma, others with a master’s degree. But they are all in search of the same thing: a job.

Hunts Point resident Evelyn Rodriguez arrived at the center early on a Monday morning and took a seat in the front row. A former security guard, Rodriguez says that she has felt the weight of the recession.

“It’s really hard,” she says. “I’ve been unemployed for one year.” Rodriguez, who has a 12-year-old daughter, has been on public assistance. “I need a job,” she says.

While the Department of Labor boasted recently that the economy has begun to add jobs again, Rodriguez is among thousands of Bronxites who find themselves without work. Unemployment in the borough stands at 14 percent, almost 5 percent higher than the national figure.

In Hunts Point, nearly 3,000 jobseekers visited Workforce 1 as of April 30, according to Cristobal Cornielle, strategic operations coordinator. Five hundred thirty-eight found work.

Administered by the city’s Department of Small Business Services, the center, which opened its doors

in August 2008, helps jobseekers at no cost. Hernandez is responsible for establishing connections with employers. “We’ve been able to develop a lot of opportunities,” he says.

But recently, the economic climate has made it more difficult. “It’s harder to find out businesses that are hiring,” Hernandez said.

Still, he has been able to link up with a variety of employers looking for guards, including local businesses like Krasdale Foods in the Hunts Point Food Distribution Center and the nonprofit apartment management firm SEBCO, as well as places around the city. Employers come to the center throughout the week to screen applicants.

Becoming a security guard is appealing because the hours are flexible and the pay is a relatively high \$14 dollars an hour or more for people with just a high school diploma, according to Senior Career Advisor Shirley Wong.

“Every week 30 to 40 customers interested in security guard positions come in just hearing about it from word of mouth,” Wong said. The high demand has led Workforce 1 to develop its own weekly security guard informational sessions.

Last year, Hunts Point resident Virginia Dipiano had to leave her job as a security guard at the Museum of Modern Art, where she had worked for four and a half years, to help take care of her sick mother.

At the museum she was sometimes required to work double shifts. “I needed a job that wouldn’t be so demanding on me,” she said.

In November, Dipiano went to Workforce 1’s Mott Haven office on East 149th Street. When she shifted to the Hunts Point site, she immediately noticed a difference. “They are more personal here,” she said,

explaining that the high volume of customers at 149th Street can be overwhelming.

Wong says it's important for Hunts Point to have its own Workforce 1 center. "There are a lot of customers that don't have a high school GED and they need certain types of services," she said. "It's important because we are helping."

Dipiano attended workshops where she learned new skills and honed old ones. "I needed to learn computer skills and how to ace an interview," she said.

The career advisers also helped her revise her resume so it showcased her experience. "At MOMA, we dealt a lot with people from all around the world, we had to protect million dollar artwork and we had to deal with burglary," she said. "They showed me to put that down."

They also helped Dipiano apply for an Individual Training Grant for the annual eight-hour training required by law for security guards.

All Workforce 1 customers can apply for these vouchers to fund any occupational skill training that will help them find employment in New York City.

Dipiano landed a job as a security guard at the New School in Greenwich Village. Now she is able to work shifts that correspond to her children's school hours. She is eligible to earn \$15 an hour after she completes her probation period.

Her son Angel, 13, has already noticed the difference. "When she worked for MOMA, we really didn't have time. I was falling back in school," he said. "My grades started going back up when she got this new job."

Even though her wages were higher at the museum, Dipiano said other benefits, including the chance for a

tuition-free college education for herself and her children, make her new job worthwhile.

"In the long run, it's really not a pay cut, because if my kids can go to college for free, I'm really saving a lot at the end," said Dipiano, who plans to take writing classes at the New School.

Dipiano has already recommended the Workforce 1 center to a number of relatives and friends, confident that it will help them find work. "If you come here, you will get a job," she said.

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