

Plan would help laid-off workers

BY LAURA YOUNGS
SENIOR WRITER

RALEIGH — State officials aimed Tuesday to give a boost to North Carolina's laid-off workers with a 10-step plan to help the unemployed get back into the job market.

"It was four years ago when the recession hit in North Carolina," said Andy Anderson, chairman of the Dislocated Worker Advisory Committee of the N.C. Rural Economic Development Center.

"We all hoped that once the recession ended, things would get back to normal. Unfortunately, that hasn't happened."

The report was presented by the Raleigh-based center.

The six-month project yielded 10 agenda items, including:

- expanding the U.S. Department of Labor's Trade Adjustment Assistance program to ensure that all workers dislocated by trade have access to services;

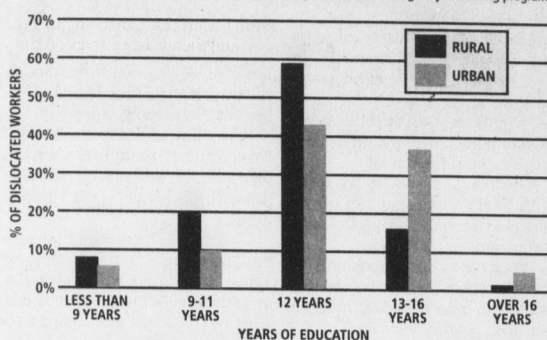
- revising the state's unemployment insurance funds to prevent future shortages such as the one that occurred in 2001; and

- establishing a non-reverting reserve fund for community colleges to deal with emergencies such as dramatic enrollment increases.

The plan is a step in the right direction to help laid-off workers and support the community college system, said Rep. Joe Tolson, D-Edgecombe. "We're going to continue to be faced with this, and we have to be better prepared."

Dislocated workers by education level

Since the state's manufacturing jobs have decreased 27 percent since 1990, the N.C. Rural Economic Development Center and community college system hope to secure funding for job training programs.



SOURCE: N.C. RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CENTER

DTH/MARY JANE KATZ

Community colleges play an important role in training workers to put them on the road to economic recovery, said Martin Lancaster, president of the N.C. Community College System.

Establishing a reserve fund also is important for the system, he said, because the colleges cannot obtain regular state appropriations quickly enough to deal with emergencies such as enrollment growth spikes.

But Lancaster said it could take several years to receive approval from the state legislature and get the reserve off the ground.

It used to be that working at a local manufacturing plant was often the best option, said Harry Payne,

chairman of the N.C. Employment Security Commission. Now, many of those plants are gone, and the state must bring together agencies to make change, he said.

Despite the recovering economy, manufacturing layoffs continue, according to the center's report. From 1990 to 2002, N.C. manufacturing jobs dropped 27 percent.

Anderson said economic competition is a sort of warfare, and it's not wise to leave the injured on the battlefield. "They represent not only a lost opportunity for them, but to all of us."

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.



DTH/WHITNEY SHEFF

Courtney Jones browses through books at Branch's Chapel Hill Bookshop in Village Plaza on Tuesday evening. After recently losing its lease, the independently owned book store may be forced to relocate or close for good.

Area bookshop may close

BY EREN TATARAGASI
STAFF WRITER

After a little more than three years of operation, a local bookstore has lost its lease and might be forced to relocate or close for good.

Branch's Chapel Hill Bookshop, owned and operated by Kate Branch, has been located in Village Plaza on Elliott Road for about three years.

But Friday, Branch found out in a phone call with the store's landlord, Mark Properties, that the store had officially lost its lease.

Because Branch was out of the state in January caring for her sick grandfather, the store fell behind on its rent.

When Branch's grandfather passed away, she returned to her store, which was already in trouble for the late payments.

She said she negotiated a payment plan with the landlord and was working on a negotiation for reduced rent.

But after a check bounced, she sent the landlord an envelope containing payment replacing the bad check and other payments.

Two weeks later, the envelope was returned to her because it had

insufficient postage.

Branch now owes about \$92,000 in rent.

"The landlord is being really vague," she said. "As long as I keep paying \$2,000 a week, they will give us time for an orderly liquidation."

Mark Properties, a Durham-based company, recently fired almost all the employees Branch had dealt with.

On Friday, the company also revoked Branch's payment plan and rent decrease and added back late fees.

"After a five-minute phone call, I owed \$50,000 more," Branch said.

Since the store announced the loss of its lease, Branch has seen much concern from locals.

"We've had such an outpouring of community support — it's amazing," she said.

One form of support for the store will come from Cartoonists Across America, a pro-literacy group based in California.

Richard Dinges, vice president of the organization, said the group first contacted Branch's to set up one of its pro-literacy tours.

Two days later, when members

visited the shop's Web site, they were shocked to see the store was in trouble.

"We talked about it and decided we want to help out by doing an event for them," Dinges said.

The planned event will be a fund-raiser tied together with the pro-literacy campaign.

"We want to focus on the plight of the shop owner," he said. "I really like the people there, and it's a shame they are going to get pushed out because of some landlord issue."

Branch said a group of authors is also planning a benefit.

"If all that works out, we might be able to stay here," she said.

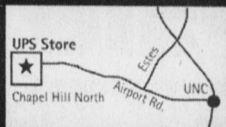
Many customers are upset that one of the few independently owned bookstores in town is in jeopardy.

"I appreciate having a locally owned bookstore and would like to see it stay," said Jane Hare, a Chapel Hill resident and a customer at the bookstore since its opening.

"They have features you don't find at larger franchise stores. It has a more personal touch."

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

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