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## Retraining offers hope, but no guarantees

# Job market demands new approach

LOUISE SMITH  
Of The News

Mike Pratt of Medicine Hat watched his career as a service technician for office equipment slowly disintegrate over five years.

He was laid off twice before starting a fruitless job search last spring.

The 41-year-old sent out five resumes a week to Regina and Vancouver and places in between for anything related to his work.

If he received a response, he was told he had good qualifications but the company had no use for him.

The experience was a rude awakening to how the job market has changed.

Twenty years ago in Regina Pratt scanned the newspaper and found six jobs that interested him. He applied for and was offered all six.

Those days feel far away to Pratt.

"It would feel so good to have someone say, 'Ya, come work for us,'" he says, gesturing his hands upwards.

Thousands of Canadians know from experience what Pratt has gone through.

In the last three years, Canada lost 250,000 more jobs than were created.

The oil and gas industry in Alberta alone dropped about 10,000 people in the past 10 years, notes Paul Johnston, regional manager of Technical Service Council, a non-profit group that provides help to those out of work and helps recruit workers for companies.

While the private sector has gone through most of its layoffs, the public sector is starting to cut staff. Johnston predicts education and health care could employ 10,000 fewer people in Alberta in the next three to five years.

There is some relief as demand for workers is up over last year. Technical Service Council alone took in 50 job orders in January and February compared to eight in the same period last year.

But companies are hiring fewer people than they would have under the same conditions five or six years ago. They are trying to avoid the boom and bust cycle, Johnston says.

David Craipley, labor market information analyst at the Canada Employment Centre in Medicine Hat, says restructuring and downsizing of the private and public sector will be a fact of life into the foreseeable future.

"The whole labor market is chang-



WORKING THROUGH OPTIONS — Mike Pratt looks at a booklet called Handbook of Choices available at the Canada Employment Centre. The booklet is tied to a computer program that combines items such as a person's education level, aptitude

ing."

To be competitive, firms have to consider such factors as technology and globalization of the marketplace.

"New jobs are taking the place of old ones."

But fewer workers are needed to improve economic performance, he says.

To give himself an edge in the new job market, Pratt has decided to retrain. He is taking engineering design and drafting technology at Medicine Hat College.

The two-year course is tough, especially when Pratt realizes he cannot afford to repeat a year.

"Going to college is a hope, but I feel a lot of times it is my only hope."

He thinks about what could happen

in the future if he and his wife Shirley, who is also out of work, cannot pay their power bill or have to sell their home.

"What will we do when there's no unemployment insurance. Are we welfare people?"

Having Shirley and his 15-year-old daughter Kelsey to think about keeps Pratt going.

"If it was just me, I might not be able to do it. Too often it would be too easy to not bother."

To help people like Pratt deal with a job loss, the Canada Employment Centre offers a career decision-making course and a job search program at no charge.

The career decision-making course,

which Pratt took to confirm his decision to take drafting technology, informs people about what jobs are in demand, how to make contact with staff and employers of various occupations and how to decide on a direction, says Karen Ziemann, employment counsellor.

The individual's interests, skills and education are also examined.

In the job search program, participants learn to tap the hidden job market rather than look for advertised positions, Ziemann says.

One approach to finding work is to send a resume and cover letter to several employers in an area where the job seeker would like to work.

Resumes should list skills, not posi-

tions, since various jobs require similar skills, she says.

Interviewing is also stressed during the three-day program since impressions are made in less than a minute, Ziemann says. A three-week, job-finding club offering more job search help is run by Community Employment Services and Medicine Hat College.

Judi Mullin of Medicine Hat credits the Canada Employment Centre job search program with helping her land her job as an administration clerk at Canadian Forces Base Suffield.

The 51-year-old had been with the Energy Resources Conservation Board for 13 years when she was laid off in June 1992.

Since she had not had to look for a job all those years, she was not used to interviews.

She froze during her first encounter with a potential employer. She could not even remember the machines she had worked with.

But some practise during the job search program gave her enough confidence to successfully finish the interview for the position she now holds.

Similar job assistance programs are offered through other agencies.

Technical Service Council recently set up a branch in Medicine Hat. It will provide companies with plans about how to tell employees about downsizing. It will help existing employees be more productive and will have a recruitment service.

Fees are \$100 to \$125 an hour for consulting about downsizing and \$2,000 to \$6,500 per employee for career training and job search assistance. Two- or three-day workshops with about five people cost \$700 per person, Johnston says.

The organization is allied with Crisis Management Resources, which counsels people suffering from stress created from a job loss, increased work demands or personal problems.

Community Employment Service offers free programs lasting up to 20 weeks for people having difficulty finding work because of the tough job market or because they have barriers such as lack of education or a poor work history, says Darren Lukasiewicz, a co-ordinator at the centre. The programs include work experience.



HORSE SENSE — Miss Rodeo Canada, Wendy Lund, explains how Buck, the horse, sees Friday. About 100 students from Montreal and Elm Street schools took in the lesson with a mixture of excitement and apprehension. The students were on hand as the site was being set up for Friday's Spring Indoor Rodeo performance. Lund, accompanied by about 10 other horsewomen, including Miss Medicine Hat Stampede and Miss

Taber, were to take part in the rodeo's grand entry. The 10 also toured Mother Teresa and St. Patrick's schools in the morning, talking to elementary students about rodeo, roping, barrel racing, team roping and horse care.

— News photo Frank Webber

## Students, instructors pack in to grill MLA

DHYANA ROCHE  
Of The News

Cypress Medicine Hat MLA Lorne Taylor met a packed house at Medicine Hat College Friday, as about 200 students and instructors turned up to grill the former school board chair.

A large number were apprentices and apprenticeship instructors who came to seek assurances their trades won't be axed next year.

"We have 100 per cent employment. We have jobs coming. We don't ask for very much time here, but we want time here," said one apprentice.

However, they didn't get many answers. Taylor said he wasn't aware what his government's plans for the program are, but promised to find out.

The province has said it wants to eliminate programs with less than 50 students by September 1995.

The college's administration planned to meet with Taylor afterward the noon-hour forum to plead for its trades.

Ralph Weeks, academic vice-president, stood at the back of the room during Taylor's speech.

"We want to share with him what we consider is an arbitrary number," he said after the speech, adding the college's trades programs were designed for only 40 students in the first place.

Weeks said the government will make exceptions for programs that are unique. He thinks Medicine Hat College

is unique. "We are the only college in Alberta that could lose all of its programs."

Student association president Calvin Wilson questioned Taylor about cuts to the college's budget that add up to 21 per cent over three years.

"This institution will have to start amputating programs and instructors," Wilson said.

He asked Taylor why an efficient institution was being cut the same as other institutions, like universities, with more waste in their budgets.

"I have no easy answers for you," Taylor replied.

"All I've got to say is we've got to try and sit down and work through this thing together. We're prepared to go to the government and fight for this college."

But after the speech, Taylor said he didn't know if Medicine Hat College is an efficient institution.

"I don't know if that's true. I can't comment on that."

Medicine Hat College's rating of fifth largest college in the province and tenth in funding is not always a fair indication of efficiency because some colleges offer programs which are more expensive than others do, he said.

Taylor said if he did find the college is being unfairly penalized, he would take those concerns to Jack Ady, minister of advanced education.

"I will certainly argue with the minister that here's an efficient institution."

Taylor said if the government finds it has made mistakes that "we've got to be willing to correct them."



TAYLOR

## Hilda petitions for flat rate phoning

LOUISE SMITH  
Of The News

Hilda residents depend on Medicine Hat for many services, but have restricted access because of long-distance charges, says Kathryn Krause, president of Hilda and Community Association.

The association wants to improve phone service with an extended flat rate calling service to the city and is collecting names of residents who support the change.

Krause expects at least 95 per cent of the 350 people living in or near Hilda will sign.

The petition says the residents would like the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission to recommend the special rate to AGT. The petition will be sent to the commission the end of March.

Hilda has been denied flat rate service because it is 71 kilometres from Medicine Hat — six km beyond the range allowed for providing the service, Krause says.

The range cannot be easily changed because of competition considerations, says Guy Martin, sales manager at the Leth-

bridge TeleCentre.

Giving Hilda the flat rate would take it out of long-distance competition. AGT would need commission consent to make a change.

However, a petition would send a signal to AGT and the commission that the 65-km distance should be reconsidered, Martin says.

Krause notes an exception should be made for Hilda because Medicine Hat is the community's commercial centre. People make phone calls to the city to reach many places, including physicians' offices, schools, businesses and agricultural services.

Krause and her family would make more calls if they did not have to pay long distance charges, she says. Many people wait until they are in Medicine Hat to make their calls.

Hilda and Community Association is taking action now because rates changed in January this year.

The one-hour monthly minimum to Medicine Hat changed to \$7 from \$5, and the option of 10 hours for \$40 replaced the \$25 unlimited rate. The change was made across the province.

## Roar from sky a mystery

The loud, prolonged roar heard from the sky Wednesday night about 7 p.m. is a mystery.

No one can confirm exactly what made the noise.

Capt. Jan Thomson of Canadian Forces Base Cold Lake said a military CF-5 jet flew over Canadian Forces Base Suffield earlier in the day but was gone by 7 p.m.

Maj. Dan Davies, base operations officer at Canadian Forces Base Suffield, confirmed the CF-5 arrived at noon, took aerial photos of the range for about 15 minutes, then left.

Davies said there was no other live activity at the base after 4 p.m.

Nadine Wightman, supervisor for Air BC, said no large planes belonging to Air Canada flew to Medicine Hat Airport Wednesday night.

There was no one available at Canadian Regional Airlines offices to comment.

None of the employees of flight services at the airport, who had been working Wednesday night, were available for comment. Staff working Friday did not know anything about a large aircraft in the area Wednesday.