

The ADVOCATE

Martinis, resumes served at job fair 'Pink Slip Party' planned in SoNo

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It isn't very often that job hopefuls go to a party to take their first step toward a new position, but they'll have that opportunity Wednesday at a "Pink Slip Party" at the Black Bear Saloon in South Norwalk.

Nearly 200 job seekers are expected at the event, which is hosted by FairfieldCountyJobs.com in Trumbull, and OperationsInc, a Stamford-based human resources agency. The event is a combination of cocktail party and job fair. But instead of job seekers supplicating at potential employers' tables, recruiters and candidates mingle in a casual setting to encourage networking, according to the planners.

"Job seekers are looking for ways to network and reach companies who are hiring, and we hope the party fosters those connections," said Chris Russell, president of FairfieldCountyJobs.com, adding that the party is limited to the first 250 people who sign up. "This is our first test. If all goes well, we'll bring it to other areas of the state."

Russell operates similar online job boards for Hartford, New Haven and New London counties, along with New York City and Westchester, Dutchess, Rockland and Putnam counties in New York state, and for eastern and western Massachusetts and Rhode Island. About 13 companies will be represented by 15 to 20 recruiters at the pink slip affair, said Russell, who advertised the party on FairfieldCountyJobs.com, and on Craigslist, Facebook and area social networking Web sites.

"I tapped my client base. I wanted to get companies that are hiring. It's really a networking event," he said.

As the December unemployment rate for the Bridgeport/Norwalk/Stamford labor market hovered at about 6 percent with 29,000 people unemployed, the timing seemed right for the event, Russell said.

"I think this is long overdue," he said.

The most recent unemployment figure for the region is lower than the real number, said David Lewis, chief executive officer of OperationsInc, noting that some who have lost their jobs have chosen not to register for unemployment compensation. Instead, they are drawing down their savings or relying on other sources of income.

"You don't see them at the unemployment center," said Lewis, who will represent seven corporate and nonprofit clients. The firm also will have career counselors to help with resume advice.

There is a growing need for events such as the one planned next week, which runs from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m., according to Lewis.

"There's the therapy aspect, as well as the practical aspects. In Fairfield County, we've been fairly well insulated when there's been an economic downturn. This time, it's not the case," he said, adding that the party could be expanded to a monthly event.

He advises participants to come with resumes and business cards.

To attend the Pink Slip Party, job seekers must register at www.fairfieldcountyjobs.eventbrite.com. Tickets are \$9 and must be bought online through credit card or PayPal.

Employers may attend for free. A limited number of spots are available. To register a company, call (800) 399-6651.

Companies that have registered include News America Marketing in Wilton, Connect Computer in Fairfield, Interactive Brokers in Greenwich and Mackey & Guasco Staffing Associates in Darien.

News America is hoping to fill entry-level sales positions, as well as information technology and finance positions.

"We are seeing more resumes, particularly from financial professionals," said Rita Meyer, executive vice president for human resources at News America, adding that most of the resumes are from people who have been laid off or think they will be laid off soon.

"There are not many from individuals currently employed, looking for new opportunities."

News America decided to attend after receiving an e-mail from Russell, asking whether it would be interested in the party. "While we certainly wish that there weren't a need for an event like this, we hope that it will provide solid opportunities for those seeking employment and that we'll find some talented candidates to join our team," Meyer said.