



## Job retraining opens doors

Returning to school to learn new skills a trend nationally

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After 10 months of being unemployed and sending out more than 300 copies of her resume, Courtney Hinson said she'd had enough.

The director of sales at Cabot Lodge on Monroe Street, Hinson was laid off after new management came in at the hotel.

"I loved my job, being in sales and networking," she said. "But everywhere I applied, I was either overqualified or there was a hiring freeze. So I decided that it was time that I returned to school."

Returning to school and retraining for a better employment situation is a national trend, said Kimberly Moore, CEO of employment service Workforce Plus. Area training providers see as much in the local demand for courses and vocational education.

"When a person finds themselves unemployed, their initial approach is to find other employment," she said. "But then after some time and they don't find a job, education is the next step. They're hopeful that another opportunity will come along by enrolling in school."

Individuals looking to transition to other fields have many training options in Tallahassee.

Hinson started in the cosmetology program at Lively Technical Center in January.

Lively offers 32 programs, said Woody Hildebrandt, principal. He believes the institute is a popular choice because it's short-term and inexpensive.

On average, programs at Lively range from \$3,000 to \$3,500, Hildebrandt said. Most of the programs take less than two years to complete, but the majority are one year. Once they finish the training, the students have certifications in such fields as aviation, automotive technology, nursing and the metal industry.

Hildebrandt said enrollment has increased three-fold in the last four years. Last year the institute served about 2,500 students. He believes this year that number will increase.

During these economic times "schools like Lively serve a tremendous purpose," Hildebrandt said.

"There are jobs waiting in the fields with the programs that we offer," he said. "We are

constantly staying on the cutting edge; as the need changes, we change the programs offered."

John Anderson started in the electronics technology program in 2009. He will finish soon and is about to start a job with the city of Tallahassee.

Anderson was in retail. But when business started to slow down, his hours were cut until eventually he was removed from the schedule, he explained.

"After that, I decided to get training to get a better job through learning a trade," he said. "This was definitely worth it."

### TCC offerings

Tallahassee Community College also offers short-term courses that end with certifications, but there are long-term programs that can lead to further education.

Alonda Hill is a student at TCC pursuing degrees in business management and early childhood development. Before enrolling, she worked at child-care centers for 12 years. Going to school for her was the only way to improve her employment situation.

Since becoming a student at TCC three and half years ago, she has co-opened an event-planning business, and she is pursuing the startup of a child-care facility of her own.

"If I had not come to school, I would be at a standstill," she said. "I would have been stagnant in my employment. I know I am bettering my situation, and I'm reaching my goals."

Some of TCC's most popular programs are in allied health.

"When people think of health care centers, they think nurses and doctors. But there are other positions people don't think about, like office positions," said Carol Easley, director of allied health at TCC.

Aside from its nursing assistant and pharmacy technician programs, there are the medical administrative specialist and national health record specialist programs.

TCC's national record specialist program will qualify its students to sit for the exam to become a certified health records specialist, Easley said. And the job possibilities through the nursing assistant program "are booming."

Other programs at TCC, such as its Tech@Night program, prepare students for computer-related certification.

Beverly Smith, program coordinator for the IT programs and workforce development, said the college sees students from all backgrounds and situations.

"It's about 50-50 job searchers who are coming in for retraining and people who are just looking to develop a new skill for their own business," she said.

There are 12 workshops offered at \$300 each — teaching programs such as Dreamweaver, the Adobe software suite, Desktop Publisher, HTML and Flash.

The web-design workshops are usually where they see people seeking a career change, she added.

Other short-term programs in Tallahassee include the North Florida Cosmetology Institute Inc. and the Real Estate School Inc.

Kim Matthews, co-founder of NFCI, said about 80 percent of its students have lost their jobs and are looking to change careers.

"I think in this economy, it's been really hard on people, so retraining is the best idea," she said. "People are always getting their hair done, especially women. And doing hair is something a computer is never going to take over."

The program takes about 11 months to complete if attended full time, and costs \$11,550, Matthews said. And there's financial aid available for those who qualify.

Matthews said there's been about a 30-percent increase in enrollment, which she believes is due to the economy.

However, the Real Estate School Inc. hasn't seen a significant change, according to Edward O'Donnell, president.

"When the real-estate market comes back, I believe we will see an increase," he said. "In past recessions, enrollment has been higher, but this has been the deepest recession the nation has seen. It's scared a lot of people from the real-estate industry."

Real estate is attractive because "people can be their own boss," he said.

The real-estate program is 63 hours, which takes about three weeks to complete and qualifies the student to take the state exam, O'Donnell said.

### [Enrollment up at Keiser](#)

[Some of the long-term programs, such as those at Keiser University, are seeing an increase in enrollment.](#)

[Kelli Lane, associate vice chancellor of media and public relations at Keiser, said enrollment has increased 12 percent. And according to a survey taken last year, 34 percent of the students would classify themselves as training for a new job.](#)

[While Keiser does not offer certificate or diploma programs, all its degrees are career-focused, she said. And students tend to finish a lot faster because the university is year-round, and the scheduling is vastly different from the traditional university.](#)

["We offer day, night, online and hybrid scheduling \(a combination of online and on-campus\) with one class per month, allowing students to work full or part time and meet family obligations while enrolled," Lane said. "Traditional institutions typically offer four courses per semester. We do as well, but only one per month rather than four](#)

simultaneously."

Keiser serves about 19,000 students at its 15 campuses throughout the state, Lane said, with 550 students at its Tallahassee campus. There are 36 associate degrees, 25 bachelor's degrees, 10 master's degrees and one doctoral degree offered at the university.

The fastest growing program is health care.

Joseph Gabovitz is a former Marine with a bachelor's degree in aeronautics. He worked in aircraft maintenance and was laid off twice, most recently last September.

After losing his job, Gabovitz became a stay-at-home dad. But he realized that living on one income was difficult. He wanted to re-enter the workforce, but he also wanted job security. To do that, he knew he needed to return to school.

"I really enjoyed aviation," he said about his 15-year career. "It was difficult to let it go. But the aviation industry is shrinking, and I wanted something more stable."

Gabovitz is now a nursing student at Keiser University, and he's working in the emergency room at a local hospital.

"I feel positive about this," he said. "It's not easy, but it's definitely worth it."

Another long-term program is ITT Technical Institute, which opened in December 2009, said Dan McGrew, director of the Tallahassee campus. The school has about 200 students and is expecting its first class to graduate in December.

ITT offers degree programs in nursing, criminal justice, information technology, electronic engineering technology, and computer-aided drafting and design, McGrew said. The lengths of the programs vary depending on the degree, but they are typically two to four years.

Before the final decision on returning to school is made, there are some things to consider.

Moore recommends first determining whether you are up for being in school. Then, figure out your key interest. Once that's done, ask yourself whether the field is recession-proof and what the financial obligations will be.

"Returning to school is not a bad thought," she said. "But you need to determine if training is the right thing for you and what exactly you need training for."