

Temping grows as option for graduates

By Richard Lee
STAFF WRITER

The job market for new college graduates is tougher than it has been for decades, but the operator of a Norwalk-based employment service is offering some sage advice for the 2.3 million people who earned their bachelor's or associate's degrees this spring.

Try temping, advises Maryann Donovan, president and founder of Impact Personnel in Norwalk.

“For new grads, they should register with temp agencies focused on their areas of interest. They should be flexible, low-maintenance,” she said. “Don’t limit yourself. You want to stand out as a flexible team player. Many temps get hired on a permanent basis after doing an outstanding job. I look at a temp job as a long-term interview.”

Data gathered by the Chicago-based global outplace-

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ment consultancy Challenger, Gray & Christmas Inc. supports Donovan’s recommendation.

The unemployment rate among 20- to 24-year-olds rose to 13.9 percent in March, up from 9.2 percent a year ago, according to the Challenger, Gray & Christmas report.

“Companies not planning job cuts are pulling back significantly on recruitment and hiring,” said John Challenger, the firm’s chief executive officer. “For job openings that do exist, college graduates are not only going up against fellow classmates, they are vying with people who have already been in the work force for three, four and five years.”

New graduates must expand their efforts beyond sitting at a computer and sending out resumes in response to online job postings, he said.

A survey of employers by the National Association of Colleges and Employers revealed that they planned to hire 22 percent fewer 2009 graduates, compared with last year.

Despite the downturn, Donovan said she has not seen a significant upswing in new graduates registering for temporary jobs, and they are squandering opportunities as a result.

“Companies use our services for family leave, an upswing in work. They can’t add headcount, so they add contract employees. We employ the contracted employee —



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Fairfield resident Kassie Philbin, who graduated from Fairfield University in January with a bachelor's degree in English, works as a temporary employee at Impact Personnel. She has worked there for nearly two months and recommends temping as an employment option for recent graduates.

not the company — so they don’t incur those responsibilities.”

Adding the experience gained in a temporary position to a resume should impress a potential employer, she said, because it shows that a job candidate has worked in a corporate environment and learned new skills. It also provided an opportunity to garner some solid references.

Fairfield resident Kassie Philbin, who graduated from Fairfield University in January with a bachelor’s degree in English, has worked as a

temporary employee at Impact Personnel for nearly two months.

“I highly recommend temping and building relationships and getting out there. It’s been a great experience,” said Philbin, adding that her job has allowed her to meet several of Donovan’s corporate clients. “I was looking for a full-time job in customer service or a related field in administration.”

She said she remains optimistic about finding a permanent position.

The recession has changed how companies use tempo-

rary employees, said Sharon Budds, human resources manager for the Bank of Ireland’s Stamford office.

“Formerly, we would use temps for temporary-type situations — vacations and pregnancy leaves. It’s different now. We’re in a hiring freeze,” she said, adding that those temporary employees have an advantage over an outside applicant when an opening occurs. “We’re a little more careful with the hiring now. There’s a much better chance for success if a person has been with a company for a month.”