

Displaced workers find work, support from program

By Mary Courtis
Of the Emerald

Jack Walker is a Eugene resident who has worked in finance and collection for the last 20 years. During this time, he held jobs at finance companies and banks and also was involved in real estate lending.

But recently, he has found it harder to find and hold a job. In the past two years, Walker, who is in his mid-40s, has been laid off twice, the first time because of a lack of clients in the real estate office where he worked and the second time because his job was discontinued by his employer.

"I had only worked at the credit union for one year," he said. "Then they reorganized the place and made it more computerized. Essentially, it did away with my job, and I was laid off again."

Walker's story is not unusual. Hard economic times and increased use of high technology are making it more and more difficult for people to find employment no matter what their qualifications and experience.

Such individuals are referred to as "displaced workers," people literally displaced from their jobs by changing technology or social conditions.

A number of programs designed to help people cope with the problems of unemployment have been created in recent years. Eugene's dislocated workers program has helped an estimated 1,000 people since it was formed four years ago, said Tamara Pinkas, an employment specialist at Lane Community College.

Money for the program comes from the federal government, so participants pay nothing. In

Oregon, the funds are channeled through state service delivery areas that contract with programs like LCC's, but a private company also can run a program.

Many people find they need to learn new skills or brush up on existing ones, Pinkas said. Others may be uncertain how to look for work or unfamiliar with the resources that could aid them in their search.

Still others need to be completely retrained to attract potential employers. The dislocated workers program at LCC is structured to deal with all these areas, she said.

"We try to adjust our program to fit the needs of each person according to their skills, experience and dreams for the future," Pinkas said.

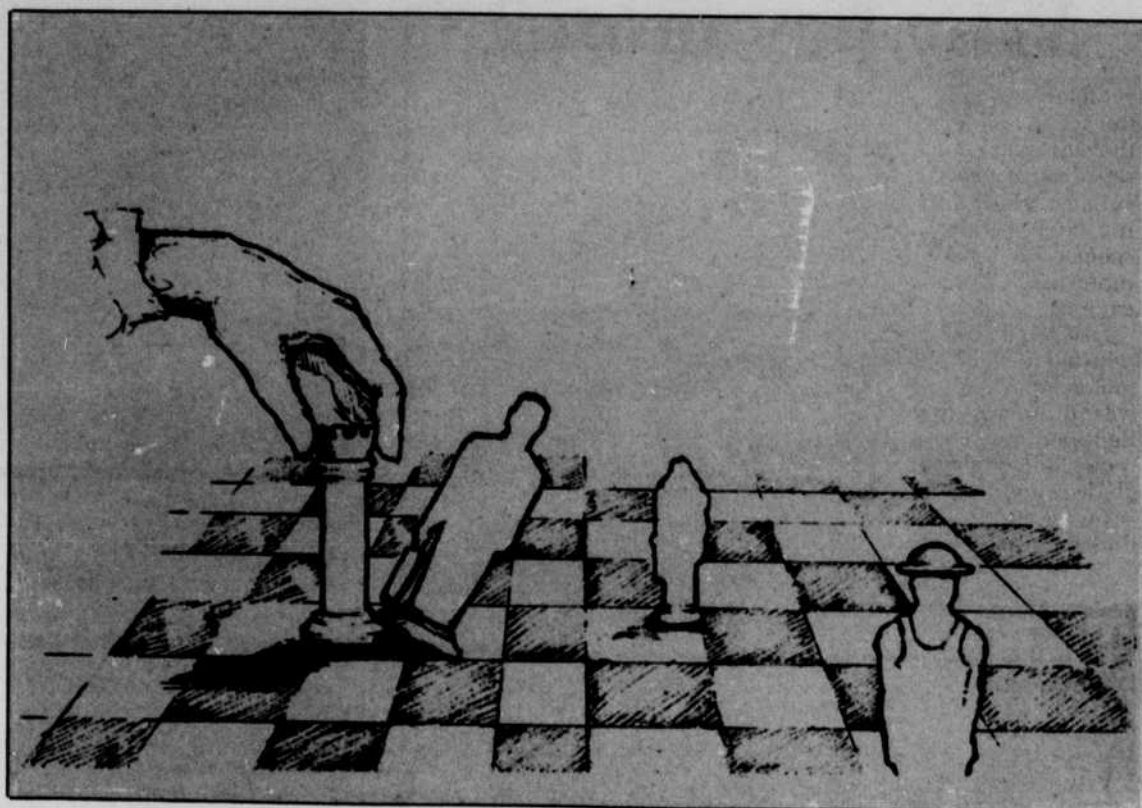
Clients entering the program participate in a career life-planning class for the first two weeks where they learn what is going on in the labor market and read books that stimulate thinking and assist them in finding job opportunities, Pinkas said.

Other services the program provides include a full-time secretary to help type letters and resumes, a phone, access to computers and typewriters, and emotional support.

"Unemployed people have a difficult time in society," Pinkas said. "In some cases, their families may not even understand or sympathize with them. We try to help them be positive and regain their sense of confidence in themselves."

Through the program, clients also tour local companies and attend presentations given by potential employers.

"We recruit lecturers and may talk with potential



Graphic by Lorraine Rath

employers about particular people," she said.

But people in the program are responsible for finding their own jobs, she said.

"They are the ones who put out the effort. They are the ones who sell themselves to the employer," Pinkas said. "We are not a job placement service — instead, we emphasize self-directed work search and encourage people to consider the center as their office away from home."

"Our services are not a free hand-out," she said. "We stress to people that they have been paying taxes for years, and this is one way the government can acknowledge their contributions and reaffirm that they are

an important and valuable part of the workforce."

Walker agreed.

"The program has been great for me," he said. "I've gotten a lot of moral support from the staff here. I would recommend it to anyone."

Participation in the program

also is a way of getting a foot in the door with potential employers, he said.

"Local employers are aware of the program," he said. "They look upon your application more favorably if you mention that you've completed the program. It really gives you an in."

Resignation

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But Randall was not confirmed by the Student Senate for what he calls "political reasons." At that time, he said SPA members, including ASUO President Lynn Pinckney, current Vice President Caitlin Cameron, current President Steve Nelson and Student Senator Randy MacDonald pushed hard to get the senate to reconsider him.

He later was appointed to the IFC for a second term. He points to this as proof that he must have been doing something right.

Since his recent disagreements with some group members, Randall said he has been "blackballed."

Later, when Randall found out that the ASUO was considering not renewing Bill Kittredge's contract as director of the Office of Student Advocacy, he said he went to Nelson, then a Student Senate member, and told Nelson that he believed Kittredge was an excellent ad-

vocate for the University and should be retained.

"Steve Nelson told me he agreed with me 100 percent, and he told me that there was no problem," Randall said. "The next day, when I found out that Kittredge's contract had been not renewed, I was furious that Steve had lied to me," Randall said.

That decision was not in the best interests of the student body, Randall said.

"It comes down to what the Office of Student Advocacy and the Office of Legal Services are there for," he said. "Are they there to serve the interests of all students or are they there to serve the interests of the ASUO president?"

The controversy surrounding the ASUO's student health insurance program is another example of the SPA-dominated government's lack of concern for students, Randall said.

Nelson "could have been the hero," Randall said, by coming out and telling students im-

mediately of the problem with Lone Star Insurance Co. not paying claims on time and not paying students interest unless they requested it.

Other committee members could not be reached for comment.

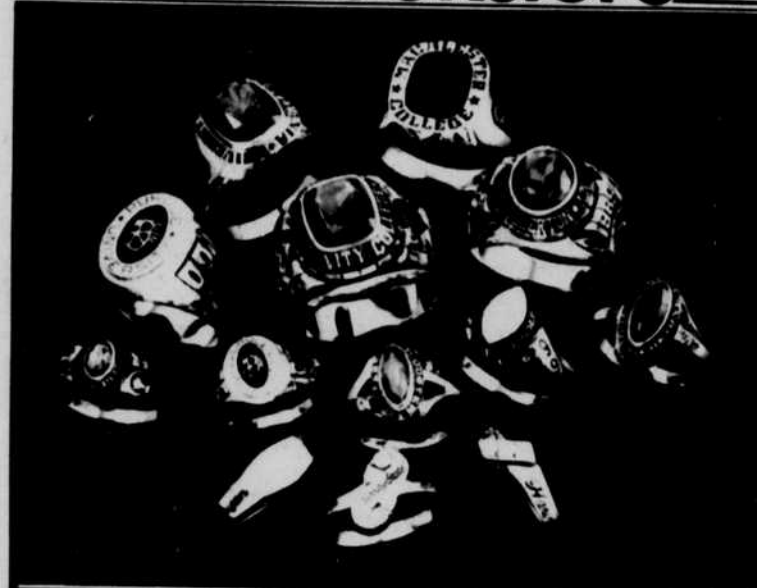
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