

JOBS GETTING THE DESERT BACK TO WORK

A game plan for valley job creation

BY DEBRA GRUSZECKI
The Desert Sun

When Summer Ellenz lost her job at a steakhouse as the economy sputtered along, the mother of three opted to get certified in solar panel installation at College of the Desert's Energy Enterprise Center last year.

Training side by side with an accountant, engineer, veteran, pilot and a utility lineman, her confidence in a future job was buoyed with on-site visits by delegates from China, Croatia and Korea.

"If I can't be working, I should get an education in a field that's important," said Ellenz, 35.

Today, a few of her former classmates are installers while she remains unemployed and works on a bachelor's degree.

"We trained for jobs that aren't available — yet. ... So, is this an industry that is viable and can do wonders? Absolutely. Has it taken off yet? No, but when it does, we'll be ahead of our game."

Renewable energy is among the four key clusters the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership focuses on in order to bring the valley 16,255 new jobs and more than \$2.3 billion in new wages by 2016.

The public-private group also has honed in on logistics, health care and media arts.

But first, future employers and the businesses that will locate here need to know the valley has a trained workforce, said Thomas Flavin, president and chief executive of CVEP.

"We are in a global competition for jobs," he said. "I believe the economic wave and have-nots will be separated by people that have common interest, a mobilized plan and a commitment to compete for good-paying jobs."

Flavin and his team is compiling a list of jobs the industry clusters are expected to create.

"The green-sector jobs, taken together, are worth hundreds of millions of dollars in salaries and



RICHARD LUI THE DESERT SUN

College of the Desert student Summer Ellenz gets a kiss from her 3-year-old son Matisse-Guereca after picking him up from the McCarthy Family Child Development and Training Center at COD on Thursday in Palm Desert. Ellenz is working on a four-year degree in the sciences after learning solar panel installation.

Industry employment projections

Newly created jobs have a multiplier effect. The environmental impact report for the proposed Blythe Solar Field project took a look at new job projections in Riverside and San Bernardino counties from 2006 to 2016. Here's a look:

- Retail sales people, 24,360.
- Cashiers, 20,170.
- Waiters and waitresses, 15,340.
- Laborers and freight, stock and material movers, 13,460.
- Food prep and serving workers, including fast food, 12,880.
- Elementary school teachers, except special education, 11,450.
- Office clerks, 11,190.
- Personal and home care aids, 9,710.
- Customer service representatives, 8,890.
- Registered nurses, 8,380.

benefits," said Wes Ahlgren, operations director of CVEP.

The Blythe Solar Plant alone predicts its project will create a construction workforce averaging about 600 workers over a 69-month period with a short term peak of 1,000, and a long-term workforce of 221. The economic impact during construction has been set at \$96 million annually.

Health care sector jobs are expected to rise as much as 14 percent by 2016. Jobs with the fastest growth rates include pharmacy technicians, physical therapy assistants, registered nurses and home health aids.

"The biggest accomplishment we've made in the last few

months has been hiring Tom Flavin as the CEO," said CVEP board chairman Clifford Daniels, a step that technically kicked off the first year of the five-year blueprint strategy.

"We haven't created a job yet, but we're seeing some measurable traction with regard to moving the blueprint forward," Daniels said. "We're establishing the relationships we need to make with our nine cities, our private partnerships and our schools."

Across the valley, a variety of CVEP-affiliated initiatives are afoot.

CVEP is working on multiple levels — universities, government agencies, the statehouse in Sacramento and think-tanks

such as Sunnylands at the Anenberg Estate — to get the word out about the valley's potential for innovative businesses and industry.

The valley blueprint also has been posted with the California Office of Economic Development.

CVEP leaders and staff have collaborated with the Riverside County Economic Development Agency and its Foreign Trade Commission to sell the region on its strong-suits: tourism, agriculture, the wind and sun.

Enterprise zones also have been showcased to attract corporate investment.

The Innovation Hub has not yet opened, but it's attracting investment attention from companies the likes of GE Capital.

"It's tremendously exciting," said John Raymond, Palm Springs' economic development director.

The valley's getting creative, too.

College of the Desert's new 119-acre west valley campus is working with locals such as Fern Field, executive producer of the hit TV show "Monk" to advance the creative arts.

Tax credits in California are helping on the filming front as well.

Filmmaker Kim Waltrip, president and CEO of Palm Desert-based WonderStar Productions, said tax credits — already allocated to 100 projects across the state — are the lure.

"Those incentives brought in an estimated \$2 billion in direct spending to California communities, and included \$736 million in wages paid to electricians, grips (and) crew-type people," Waltrip said, and are fueling projects and creative new ventures here.

Judith Paixao gets the promise the Coachella Valley holds for job creation in the media and film industry.

Her husband, Kev Lombard, director of the Wounded War-

riors program, is working with CVEP to identify internships for 28 Marines who are being trained for civilian careers in media arts.

"We're training them to ID, write, produce, shoot and edit a simple news story" and gain skills that help them get on-the-job training for new, civilian careers, Paixao said. The first class graduated on Friday.

"The exciting part about it is the training doesn't stop at the end of class," she said. "As far as we're concerned, that's when the real training begins: We have four potential clients looking to hire our Wounded Warriors for a series of training videos, corporate video production, website work and podcasts."

CVEP's also been pounding the pavement through a new Pathways to Success initiative to increase financial aid applications in the valley, so a greater share of valley students qualify for college-level aid, scholarships and grants.

Don Perry, vice chair of CVEP, said an informational event will be held in 10 different spots on Feb. 23 to help parents and students fill out the forms. To fuel high-returns, CVEP is offering \$10,000 in prize money to schools with the highest percentage of completed aid forms.

To raise the purse, a school talent competition reception — a modified Coachella Valley-meets-American Idol event — will be held Friday at UC Riverside Palm Desert.

With a large percentage of households with school-aged children living at or below the poverty rate in some valley locales, this simple step could provide more students with college opportunities, said Terry Green, who handles CVEP's Pathways to Success.

The program will award \$1.5 million in scholarships to 430 students this year.

Health care needs and services, at the moment, are driv-

In case you missed it

Read earlier stories from The Desert Sun's 12-week job series at mydesert.com/desertjobs

Find a local job

Check out **page A20** and this page and visit mydesert.com/jobs for Coachella Valley job listings and career advice.

Also, learn more about the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership's goals in an interview with CEO Thomas Flavin on **Page E1**.

How are you doing?

Have you struggled to find a job during the recent recession? Did you find a job following a long hiatus? Have you found a job in which you earn far less than you used to? Are you a business struggling to find workers? Please share your stories with The Desert Sun via e-mail at business@thedesertsun.com for possible inclusion in a future story.

ing the largest share of CVEP's four initiatives.

While unemployment in the Coachella Valley is near an all-time high, the health care services sector is one of only two industries that did not see a drop in jobs in 2008 and 2009.

Nursing care facilities and hospitals posted the strongest gains, rising 4.5 percent and 3.8 percent, respectively.

Training in these fields is making inroads in the valley.

The Versant RN Residency program offered by Desert Regional Medical Center is one example. The program includes a residency commitment after graduation and has been so popular, it requires a 4.0 GPA to apply. The last round drew 120 applicants for 20 slots, Daniels said.

The fourth industry cluster, logistics, is considered important, but is a lower priority and requires broader regional coordination, Daniels said.

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START BUILDING

Employment Opportunities

COLLEGE OF THE DESERT

College of the Desert is currently recruiting for the following positions:

ASL/Interpreters: \$12.83-\$36.96/hour

ASC Language Lab Liaison: \$36.43-\$49.52/hour

Senior Program Specialist/Office of Student Life: \$3,065/month, 11 month position

Positions are open until filled.

Please note:
We accept online applications only.
To view job postings and to apply online go to: jobs.collegeofthedesert.edu
Human Resource Office, College of the Desert, 43500 Monterey Ave., Palm Desert CA 92260.
Equal Opportunity Employer

Employment Opportunities

SECURITY OFFICER with guard card, Palm Springs, Coachella 951-229-2646

Medical

Dental: **RDA/DA** Part time and full time positions. Fax resume to Bliss Dentistry in La Quinta 760-777-9129

DENTAL- **RDA** full time experience. Immediate **DENTRIX**, friendly. Send resume to: theoffice.ps@gmail.com

Patient Care Coordinator: Indio CA
We are seeking an experienced full-time front office Patient Care Coordinator to work at our busy-Dental office.

The successful applicant must have a minimum of 4 to 5 years dental front office experience and know the following:

- Understand dental terminology
- Able to schedule appointments (for patients checking in and out for dental services)
- Understand dental insurance HMO and PPO
- Able to establish collection protocol for dental treatment and coordination of insurance benefits. Able to understand EOB's
- Must have excellent communication skills both verbal and written
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- If you have dental specialty experience, ortho, perio, oral surgery this is a big plus.
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FAX: 1-887-736-6576
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NEW TODAY

DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR
Guide Dogs of the Desert

Development professionals with at least 3 years direct professional fundraising experience, are encouraged to apply for this exciting position. An articulate individual with a sense of humor and excellent writing/speaking skills is needed to take on the challenge of developing all traditional aspects of a fundraising program (please note: fundraising events are not within the primary responsibilities). Excellent benefits and working conditions. Salary: \$25,000-\$85,000/yr full time. Applications including cover and CV should be sent to chil@gdc.org. Position open until filled.

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