

PROGRAM PREPARES GRADUATING SENIORS They gain a fast start in slow economy

BY BETTY ADAMS
Staff Writer

AUGUSTA — Where are all the seniors going?

Likely, they'll be taking part-time jobs or working around home while they consider their future options if they're not heading to college in the fall.

When seniors enrolled in the Augusta-based Jobs for Maine's Graduates programs — about 500 throughout the state — walk out their high school doors with diplomas just five weeks from now, they will face a brutal job market. Unemployment rates are highest — 21.8 percent — for

PLEASE SEE SENIORS A4 those age 16-19, according to 2010 figures from the Maine Department of Labor.

The Jobs for Maine's Graduates students gathered this week at the Augusta Civic Center for fun and games, some learning exercises, and to display their talents.

Kayleigh Watson, a senior at Sanford High School, is in an enviable position as holder of two part-time jobs: one at Barnacle Billy's, a seasonal restaurant on the waterfront in Ogunquit; and one as an associate at TJ Maxx.

She worked both jobs last summer, as well, and said she hopes the TJ Maxx post will become full-time in the fall.

"I enjoy the money, and I really need the money," Watson said. "But I have no social life."

The Jobs for Maine's Graduates program, she said, "brought forward a lot of job ideas, and the various colleges presentations made me question what I want to do."

Another Sanford senior, Brianna Turner, wants a career as a pastry chef.

She is taking a culinary arts class at school and heading for

Southern Maine Community College in the fall.

Robert Cameron, of Burnham, president of Jobs for Maine's Graduates at Maine Central Institute, Pittsfield, said upper-class members who were vocational students sought the JMG program after it was offered to freshmen and sophomores.

"Instead of a study hall, we wanted to use our time better," he said. "JMG would help us with job skills and skills for later in life."

He said he's already used the skills on his job at Burger King in Newport.

"I'm probably going to keep working there and pick up a second job to save for my goal of getting a motorcycle license," he said. "JMG taught me to make a goal and achieve it."

Longer-term, he is hoping to emulate his dad and have a career as a graphic designer, Web designer or IT specialist — jobs Cameron knows will require at least a two-year degree.

Sadie Dixon, a senior at Waterville Senior High School, said she's waiting until graduation to seek work.

It's too hard to fit in now between doing classwork and playing softball.

She will head to Hannaford supermarket to apply because a friend of her mom has offered to recommend her.

"I definitely need to get a job because I'm going to beauty school in the fall," she said.

Dixon hopes to follow in her aunt's footsteps.

Her aunt has her own beauty salon.

"I've always admired her," Dixon said.

She credits JMG — and Waterville teacher Joe Haney in particular — with "helping me understand life more" and with gaining an ability to speak in front of a crowd.

Willie Pelotte of Oakland, a junior at Messalonskee High School, already has a part-time job in the automotive department at Kmart in Augusta.

It fits perfectly into his race-car driving ambition.

"I actually race cars already," he said. Mostly he races late model stock cars.

But in October, he's heading to North Carolina to try NASCAR driving.

JMG has helped him advance his public speaking ability.

"It probably gave me my job because it gave me better interview and resume-writing skills," Pelotte said.

The students brought their creative skills to the JMG conference, decorating booths with themes representing success.

Woodland High School students, for instance, set a pair of sparkling ruby slippers on a stand in front of a backdrop "Follow the Yellow Brick Road to Success."

Other booths featured food, drink, candy, rap music and other marketing attractions for teens.

Colby Staples, a senior at Madison Area Memorial High School, staffed a booth that emitted multicolored strobe lights. He is completing the paperwork to enlist in the U.S. Air Force.

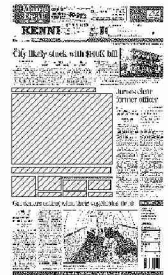
For the summer, though, he's heading to the woods where he runs a skidder and logs family land.

In a room in the north wing of the civic center, Mike Ross of Bath Iron Works, instructed small groups of students on the rules for assembling plates of steel.

The notched pieces had to



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lock into place to form a specified shape.

Then he watched as the teams all knelt on the floor, maneuvering the longer and shorter pieces to try to get them to fit into the pattern in the fastest, most efficient time.

"They only go together one way," Ross said. He watches the groups to see "who's the natural born leader" and then to see who else asserts themselves in the team-building exercise.

"Jobs for Maine Graduates works with students who face barriers to education and success. It prepares them for education and the work force," said Lisa Gardiner, communications director for JMG. "It's a drop-out prevention and school-to-work program, but kids today need more. They need on-the-job

training at trade schools or colleges."

She said the program encourages the students to continue their education.

"It is preparing them for success in life," she said

The Maine Department of Labor offers a list of in-demand jobs that require only a high school diploma.

However, Adam Fisher, department spokesman, added, "The greatest growth is in sectors that requires some sort of postsecondary education. The smartest thing young people can do is look at what jobs will be in demand."

Those who want to see current job openings can check the Maine Job Bank at www.mainecareercenter.com.

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PICK YOUR FIELD

Top occupational categories for workers with a high school diploma and current openings in Maine's Job Bank:

- Retail salespersons: 116
- Customer service representatives: 93
- Cashiers: 79
- Personal and home care aides: 78
- Psychiatric aides: 64
- Nursing aides, orderlies and attendants: 55
- Home health aides: 50
- Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers: 50

Source: Maine Department of Labor



Staff photo by Andy Molloy

TIME FOR FUN: Holly Allen mans the Gardiner Area High School booth at the Jobs for Maine's Graduates career development conference last week in Augusta.