



ATLANTIC CITY — A crowd of the region’s unemployed and underemployed converged Tuesday evening on Caesars Atlantic City for a job fair held by the New Jersey Coalition for Financial Education to assist workers and prepare them to re-enter the workforce.

Job seekers were able to meet with local and regional employers for job opportunities. Information on assistance for utility bills and avoiding foreclosure was available from businesses and nonprofit organizations.

“We’re giving them hope and preparing them to get back out there with resume preparation and interview skills. We are providing them with the resources they need at this most crucial time,” NJCFE staff member Steven Drulis said of the over 8,000 unemployed ex-casino workers in the Atlantic County region after the closings of four casinos last year.

Drulis said the kickoff job fair event catered to former casino workers in the region as well as the city's homeless, disabled and veterans.

A small group of area employers were looking to hire workers, including Caesars.

A line of people, some clutching their resumes and interested in obtaining employment at the casino, spoke with Jill S. Smith, recruitment specialist for Caesars Entertainment.

Asmitaben Patel, 53, of Atlantic City, is a former casino worker who said she is desperately looking for employment after she was laid off from her housekeeping job at the Trump Taj Mahal. Patel, originally of India, has been in the United States just three years and speaks only some English. She said at this point any job will do. With only a green card and not a U.S. citizen, she said, she has no health benefits, and she cannot survive with a part-time job.

"Sometimes my daughter helps or my son gives me money. Any job for me. I just need a job, period," she said.

Michael Cousin, 37, of Atlantic City, lost his job at the Earl of Sandwich Restaurant when Showboat Casino closed last year. Like Patel, he said he is willing to do any job he can find. Cousin, of Atlantic City, said he learned about the job fair this week and was hopeful to come and potentially have a job opportunity.

"My unemployment is almost up. I lose it next month. It's going to be difficult because I've got bills. I have some job possibilities out there now, and I'm throwing arrows and hoping one of them sticks," Cousin said.

But new jobs weren't the only thing on the crowd's radar Tuesday evening. One of the financial tools offered at the job fair was assistance with avoiding home foreclosure.

Stephanie Bittner, a community outreach coordinator and education manager for Clarifi of the Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Delaware Valley, said she came to the event as a vendor to assist the unemployed and underemployed in finding ways to save their homes from foreclosure. Bittner told job fair participants there are options and resolutions available to homeowners facing financial hardships during the early stages of the foreclosure process.

She said some of the participants were scared Tuesday evening and resistant to sharing their story of hardship.

"One man told me he is struggling with paying his car loan, he's having a hard time paying his mortgage and his credit card bills. The biggest problem he's facing is that he's broke," she said of what the man wrote on a questionnaire provided at the job fair.

Michael Drulis, NJCFE executive director, said additional events like the one held Tuesday evening will be scheduled in Camden, Trenton and Newark.

For more information visit [www.njcfef.org](http://www.njcfef.org).

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