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**Subject:** After layoffs, many workers go back to school (USA Today)

FYI, from Bob Donley -

### **After layoffs, many workers go back to school**

By Judy Keen, USA TODAY

MASON CITY, Iowa — In this tough economy, the path from a layoff to a new career often runs through a classroom.

After Shannon Boge was laid off twice from factory jobs within a year, she knew it was time for a different occupation. "My only chance is to go back to school," she recalls deciding. "I've got to do this, and that's it."

Millions of laid-off workers are being forced to make tough decisions about their futures. Since the recession began in December 2007, the economy has lost more than 5 million jobs. In March, U.S. employers cut 663,000 jobs.

Pursuing a new career — even one that pays less — can be an easy call for people whose old jobs have disappeared, forcing them to re-evaluate their version of the American dream.

Boge, 30, who has two sons, is studying at North Iowa Area Community College (NIACC) here. She's willing to trade the bigger paycheck that came from working 10 or more hours of overtime at the factory every week for a 40-hour-a-week job that doesn't require her to work overnight shifts or worry about the next round of layoffs.

She plans to become a physical therapy assistant, Boge says, "because anything in the medical field is pretty safe right now."

Federal and state tuition aid for displaced workers entering college and vocational programs can make returning to school an appealing option: Students often can continue to collect unemployment benefits. Boge gets financial aid that covers most of her school costs and receives unemployment benefits as long

as she's enrolled.

The \$787 billion economic stimulus bill signed in February by President Obama includes \$1.7 billion for adult employment services, including training, according to the Department of Labor.

Even so, the transition from old dreams to new realities can be painful. Leontine Jameson, manager of The Employment Transition Center in Henrico County near Richmond, Va., says many laid-off workers are "struggling to find jobs in the same field, at the same salary level."

Eventually, she says, "many will realize they need to look at another path."

To attract laid-off workers, community colleges and technical schools are tailoring programs to appeal to adults who need new skills, working with local companies to match their needs and sending staff into factories and other workplaces to spread the word about state and federal retraining assistance.

There's growing demand for certificates and degrees that can be earned in a year or less and for training in emerging fields such as wind- and solar-energy technology and "green" construction.

When the recession eases, those industries might be among the first to start hiring. Many laid-off workers also are signing up for classes in old-school trades that still are in demand: heating and air-conditioning installation and repair, welding and truck driving.

Community college enrollment was up from 2% to 27% compared with a year ago at 100 colleges who participated in an informal survey last month by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). River Parishes Community College in Louisiana reported a 23.7% increase; Seminole Community College in Florida, 18%; South Puget Sound Community College in Washington state; 14%. AACC spokeswoman Norma Kent says displaced workers account for much of the growth.

It didn't take displaced worker Brandon Shahan, 35, long to choose a different path. He worked at a glass factory that closed in December and thought about finding another factory job — until the factory where his dad worked for 30 years began laying people off.

Now Shahan is enrolled in NIACC's one-year wind-turbine technician program and receives student aid and unemployment benefits. The size of his next paycheck is less important to him than stability.

"I'd like to get into something where I have some kind of security," he says.

Laid-off workers often are "terrified almost to the point of paralysis, except they realize that if they can re-engineer their skills, they can ... get back into the workforce," says Marsi Liddell, president of Aims Community College in Greeley, Colo.

Enrollment there is up 10% this semester from a year ago, driven largely by the newly unemployed.

#### **'Factories are done'**

Tim Detrick, 42, was laid off from his factory job after nine years and enrolled in a two-year heating and air-conditioning program at NIACC. Going back to school was hard, he says, but he made the honor roll every semester and now has a full-time job at a Mason City company.

"Factories are done in this town," Detrick says. Some of his laid-off co-workers at a plant that made ice and soda machines were hired at a cement plant. Plant officials announced last month that it's closing.

Iowa's unemployment rate is 4.9%, but jobless rates in the nine counties served by NIACC ranged from 5.9% to 9.1% in February. In 2000, none had unemployment rates higher than 4%. During the past 15

months, at least 13 businesses and factories in the area announced layoffs or closures.

One of them was an RV plant in Charles City, Iowa, where Tyrone Foster drove a forklift. When the closure announcement came last summer, Foster knew exactly what he would do next.

"I felt sad seeing other people start crying. They didn't know what to do," says Foster, 48. "I had been telling everyone in the plant that I wanted to cook."

Foster had been at the RV factory for four years; before that, he worked for 10 years at a chicken-processing plant that also closed. His grandmother, who raised him, taught him to cook. He attended the University of Arkansas for two years after high school, then dropped out to care for her when she became ill.

Now he's the oldest student in a class of nine in NIACC's two-year hospitality and food service program. Getting up to speed on math was tough, Foster says, but he hasn't missed a day of classes. By the time he graduates next year, he says, the economy should be better, and he hopes to find a restaurant job.

"I made my own luck," says Foster, who has two children and is able to go to school full time because he collects jobless benefits and student aid. "I never gave up. I stayed out of trouble and did something positive to my life."

Foster didn't have to hunt for information about making his cooking dream a reality: NIACC staffers went to the plant to outline options to employees. The college also holds open houses for midcareer adults.

"This is the next step that's also a beginning," NIACC President Debra Derr says. The school retools its courses to accommodate new technology and to meet local employers' needs, she says.

A year ago, NIACC began offering a wind-turbine technician program. It's developing a transportation logistics program to train workers for a new company that plans to transport wind-turbine and biomass components by rail.

"We can turn on a dime," says Josh Byrnes, chairman of NIACC's agriculture and industrial technology division. The school also is considering "green" construction and technology programs.

There's also big demand in this area for welders. Sixty NIACC students are studying welding, and Byrnes says separate evening classes for Spanish speakers and farmers are popular.

Chris Wogstad, 21, left a pesticide factory job to learn to weld.

"I didn't like factory work at all. I had to get out of there," he says. "I want to get new skills so I don't ever have to work in a factory again."

### **Catering to older students**

Michigan, which has the USA's highest jobless rate — 12% in February — offers adults up to \$5,000 for two years of retraining at a community college.

Oakland Community College in Bloomfield Hills has 227 students in the program, up from 75 when it began in 2007, says Sharon Miller, workforce development dean.

The school has created courses that allow older students to update their math, reading and computer

skills, Miller says, and offers compressed programs in dental assisting, car repair, emergency dispatch and the film industry that can be finished in a few weeks or months by adults who need to find jobs fast.

Those skills, she warns, usually qualify graduates for entry-level jobs with pay that doesn't match what they made before their layoffs.

In the second year of a job search, even lower pay "starts looking pretty good," she says.

Elsewhere:

- The average age of students at Larry Selland College of Applied Technology at Idaho's Boise State University is about 30, senior enrollment specialist Adrian San Miguel says. The oldest students are around 60.

Many laid-off workers there are pursuing new careers in medical fields and information technology. "There's a lot of initial fear and uncertainty about starting school," San Miguel says. "One of the first things they say is, 'It's been a while since I've been in school.' We tell them not to let that hold them back."

- Full-time enrollment at Warren County Career Center in Lebanon, Ohio, is 400, up dramatically from two years ago, adult education director Tom Harris says. All its health care programs are at capacity, and a program that trains power-line technicians graduated its first class last month, he says.

Laid-off workers usually become motivated students, but they can be traumatized when they first seek help, Harris says. An aviation mechanic who lost his job with an international shipping company "broke down and cried" when he came in to discuss a new career.

"He said, 'Where do I start? Where do I go from here?' " Harris recalls.

- Enrollment is up 28% at Shawnee Community College in Ullin, Ill. The school offers 16-week programs in appliance repair, heating and air conditioning, auto body and catering to speed the unemployed back into the workforce, spokeswoman Sharon Felker says.

Enrollment in a six-week truck-driving course has doubled. That program's job-placement rate is 100%. Detrick, the former factory worker who works for a Mason City heating and air-conditioning company, decided soon after he was laid off that he needed to find another path.

He didn't take high school seriously, and learning to study again took time. He threatened to quit school a couple times when he became frustrated with the immaturity of some of his teenage classmates, he says.

Detrick did an internship with the company that hired him and had the job lined up before he finished classes. His wife, Michelle, who encouraged him to find a new career, is taking business classes. His son, Ruiz, 11, is getting better grades because "he comes home and Dad isn't sitting in front of the TV anymore," Detrick says.

Fighting back tears, Detrick says that when he participates in graduation ceremonies in May, "I will walk across the stage as an example for my boy, to show him, hey, I can do it."