Plainfield Public Library Expands Job-Related Computer Training

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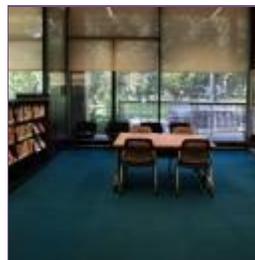
UPDATE: Pictures of the new Job Assistance Computer Center are now available!

Unemployment in Plainfield has been in double digits since January of 2009, and as high as 14.3% early in 2012. With a significant digital divide in this low-income community, there has been a pressing need for the unemployed to learn job-related computer skills. Although the library has had 19 public-access computers, lines would form at peak periods, mostly by job seekers doing job searches or waiting to see if they had an email response from an application. In comparison to the 2,900 computer user sessions in June of 2011, the library recorded 4,500 user sessions in June of 2012.

The Plainfield Public Library is the only not-for-profit agency in the community providing this job search assistance, but the open plan of the main floor has precluded the computers from being used for group training. For lack of a computer lab, computer training classes, including BTOP, had been held in a conference room. Twice weekly, laptops had to be set up, locked down, and then put away, in order for the room to be reset for community meetings. One BTOP session on a Saturday had to be aborted when a power outage terminated the wireless connection.

This summer the library finally had a chance to create a permanent computer lab, thanks to a HUD grant of $10,000 and private donations of $20,000. Within the open space of the main-floor, a 14'h x 25'w glass wall was erected to create a room with 18 wired computer stations, an instructor station, and a wall-mounted (ultra-short throw) 3M digital projector. The new computers are linked into the SAM scheduling system and allow for extended time for drop-in sessions.

Completed in August of 2012, the *Job Assistance Computer Center* will focus on training the unemployed and under-employed, providing instruction on developing résumés, conducting online jobsite searches, and submitting applications online. The new space is large enough to hold thirty people for presentations on employment issues and training workshops. The library is working with community and county agencies to bring in speakers and advisors on job re-training and re-entry services. With the launching of its new computer center, the library is looking forward to reconnecting with the Union County College BTOP trainers.

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