

The Courtyard by Marriott bustled with activity Friday as 22 High Country businesses met with 165 jobseekers at the High Country Job Fair. "This event was a collaborative effort between the North Carolina Division of Workforce Solutions, the High Country Workforce Development Board, Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute, and the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce," said Rebecca Bloomquist, Special Projects Coordinator of the High Country Workforce Development Board. "A lot of people worked very hard on this event, and we are all pleased with the result."

The fair represented nearly three months of work by the sponsoring organizations that included the following: organizing the venue; contacting businesses within Watauga, Avery, Ashe, and Wilkes counties; and aggressively promoting the event to area job seekers.

"From the beginning we knew that space was limited to around 20 tables, so we needed to make sure every business attending was actively recruiting for current or projected openings," said Jacob Clark, Business Services Representative of the High Country Workforce Development Board. Clark, along with Charlie Anderson of the NC Division of Workforce Solutions, was responsible for conducting business outreach. Both coordinated an effort in their respective offices that resulted in over 100 business contacts in the target area. The effort paid off and all twenty spaces were filled in the week leading up to the event.

The High Country Job Fair represented more than 130 jobs in the hospitality, healthcare, technology, and education fields. Among the attending businesses were Catawba Valley Staffing, Appalachian State University, Watauga County Schools, Linville Ridge Country Club, Appalachian Regional Healthcare System, and Lowes Companies.

"Once we had confirmed attending businesses and determined the types of jobs they were attempting to fill we reached out to the local colleges and universities and contacted our community partners to ensure that each employer had qualified applicants to meet with," Anderson said.

Mid-morning Congresswoman Virginia Foxx arrived at the event and spoke at length with the attending businesses and job seekers. The congresswoman also met with event organizers to discuss the local employment situation and the many resources provided to area businesses and job seekers by the sponsoring organizations.

"The response from the community has been overwhelmingly positive," Bloomquist said. "We are thankful to the Courtyard by Marriott for their hospitality, all of the participating employers, attending jobseekers and to other area businesses that helped out including Sagebrush, Peabody's Wine and Spirits, The InnPlace (formerly Hampton Inn), Wendy's, Hospitality Mints, and the Boone Police for their support."

The event was the area's fourth semi-annual hiring fair since 2009 and was designed to meet businesses' summer hiring needs.

"We are very pleased with the results of the job fair," Anderson said. "This event continues to grow and build momentum, and we look forward to continuing our efforts to meet the High Country's employment needs."