

The RVA Career Expo sets record for candidate participation.

Imagine 1,100 job openings posted for candidates before an event. That's the number made available at the RVA Career Expo, held March 8 at the Cultural Arts Center in Glen Allen.

The event, sponsored by the Richmond Chapter of the Virginia Tech Alumni Association in partnership with Career Prospectors and Jobs Assistance Ministry (JAM), drew the participation of 112 employers.

A record 1,143 candidates participated, traveling from as far away as Pennsylvania, Washington, D.C. and Maryland. More than 20 percent were students, representing 23 colleges from around the Commonwealth.

The Career Expo has been held since 2009, said Charlie Wood, a Virginia Tech graduate who founded Career Prospectors in 2002. "The event attracts a wide variety of employers with professional jobs, many of whom are small and never recruit on a college campus," he said. "Large employers, such as VDOT, the Federal Reserve, Virginia Tech HR and Union Bank offer hundreds of opportunities. In 2013, we started doing the RVA Career Expo during both the fall and spring breaks."

Notable participants included Capital One, University of Virginia Human Resources, Newport News Shipbuilding and several construction firms.

Dianna Morely and Marylinn Minor, co-operations managers for the event, organized over 120 volunteers and oversaw 71 advance training sessions. "Operations management for this incredible event was a huge undertaking but so much fun," said Minor. "I am honored to have served as co-operations manager," added Morely.

A great number of the volunteers are affiliated with Career Prospectors and JAM, said Patrice Strachan, chairperson of the Expo. (She was recognized as Virginia Tech Alumni Volunteer of the Year for 2017-18.)

Liaisons played an integral role in the event, including standout work by Anne Wrinn, Beth Gryder, Curt Hammond and Jewel Glenn, each of whom volunteered to cover 20 or more companies.

The event is heavily publicized through social media. "Tweets reached over 84,000 accounts," said Strachan. "Dozens of LinkedIn and Facebook posts

helped promote employers' attendance and brought visibility to our members."

Kimberly Downer, a Division HR Manager for Henrico County, also applauded the value of social media. "We appreciate you helping us promote our attendance through Twitter and LinkedIn. We had over 150 job seekers visit our booth," she told Morely.

Volunteers were on hand to meet every need, from posting jobs on LinkedIn before the event to helping set up tables during the day. "Employers indicate this is the most hospitable event they attend, and they appreciate the support by volunteers," said Wood.

"Our hospitality is bar none," Virginia Tech grad and multiyear volunteer Christine Hodges told Jewel Glenn. "That's what keeps the recruiters coming back."

Those volunteers are well-trained. Seventy-one training events were held ahead of the expo.

A comment from volunteer Mitchell Fontana is indicative of the sentiments of many participants: "Extraordinary coordination, execution, collaboration and customer service. Great things only come from great, caring, virtuous people."

Wood said he sees the event as an extension of Virginia Tech's motto, "Ut Prosim (That I May Serve).

Service also comes in the form of financial assistance for students, said Jason Habel, vice president and scholarship chair of the Richmond Chapter of the Virginia Tech Alumni Association. "This event's mission is to benefit those seeking employment, and consequently the recruiter registration fee is very modest. Yet because of the success of the event, the proceeds have had a significant impact on the Richmond Chapter's scholarship fund. In 2017, the two RVA Career Expos fully funded nine \$2,500 scholarships for Virginia Tech freshmen and transfer students."