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Jobless tech control

Ottawa Talent Initiative provides networking support for local workers

By [DAVE PIZER](#), Ottawa Sun

JIM McQUAID spent 25 years working for Nortel, before he felt the wrath of the tech bust that cost him his job. After a turbulent five years that included four new jobs and a total of 30 months of unemployment, McQuaid is back at Nortel, having lived to tell the tale.

McQuaid shared his story at the second Ottawa Talent Forum, hosted by the Ottawa Talent Initiative, an organization created by unemployed hi-tech workers to help each other find meaningful work.

McQuaid became so frustrated with his search that he started looking outside the tech sector, applying at the Lord Elgin Hotel, the Ottawa police and for sales positions.

"It's been tough mentally and financially, no doubt about that," McQuaid told the audience at the Nepean Sportsplex.

McQuaid turned to the Ottawa Talent Initiative, helping others, as well as himself, find work.

JOB SEARCH HELP

It gave him a sense of being engaged and belonging, he said, and provided a supportive environment where people weren't shy about saying they'd been out of work four times in five years.

"I felt good there and I thought it would lead me to sustainable employment," said McQuaid.

"I didn't want to work at RadioShack."

Yesterday's event featured an extended networking session where job seekers could introduce themselves to industry people and talk to representatives from different job searching services.

The event also featured several speakers who discussed industry trends, the progress the initiative has made and the next steps it needs to take.

Gary Davis, executive director of the Ottawa Talent Initiative, agrees with industry watchers who've predicted the tech sector is rebounding.

"Absolutely," said Davis. "I don't have science behind it, so it's anecdotal, but more and more people in the (Ottawa Talent Initiative Action Centre) aren't coming back."

STAY CURRENT

One challenge is helping unemployed tech workers stay current with the latest developments in the fast-moving industry, he said.

"In technology, things move fast, so in certain fields you can be out of date over the weekend, let alone over a year," said Davis.

The initiative helps people make connections with area companies so they can stay current as well as possibly find work, he said.

The industry outlook may be brighter and the Ottawa Talent Initiative was certainly a big help, but after what he's experienced in the past five years, McQuaid is still prepared for the worst.

He continues to donate his time at the Ottawa Talent Initiative Action Centre, partly because he wants to give back, but also because he knows he may need it again. "History says I will," he said.

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