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Deputy secretary: 1,500 here will lose jobless benefits by December

September 2, 2010 - By SHAWNA T. TURNER sturner@sungazette.com

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The local unemployment rate fell by 0.02 percent to 9.5 percent in July, consistent with the national rate, but higher than the state's rate of 9.3 percent.

With unemployment numbers still near 10 percent, and slim to no chances of another extension on unemployment benefits, a wave of people will exhaust 99 weeks of unemployment benefits in December, according to Dr. Robert G. Garraty, state deputy secretary for workforce development.

Those on unemployment should not wait until their benefits expire before working on additional training to add to their

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skill set because employers may be wary about employing someone who has been unemployed for a long period of time, he said.

"Finding a job should become their job," Garraty said of those collecting benefits. "It sounds trite to say that, but it's true. They have to keep putting those applications in. But, I think the most important thing they can do is to analyze themselves in a truthful manner and to ask themselves what are they lacking or missing and how could they better themselves."

CareerLink has training programs that may assist people with finding the training and jobs needed, Garraty said.

"What we are very concerned about is, by the beginning of December, there are going to be about 157,000 people coming off of unemployment compensation in the commonwealth. In Lycoming County, the number is 1,500," Garraty said. "It is going to be a very difficult time for a lot of folks right before Christmas."

Garraty said that although there are six people for every job opening and employers are willing to hire, there is a disconnect between the two because those looking for work may not have the skills employers are looking for.

Manufacturing is an important key to reducing the unemployment rate, according to Garraty.

"Even though people say that manufacturing is going overseas, it is still an important part of our economy in Pennsylvania. What is going overseas are those jobs that are low-skilled, repetitious, the kind of manufacturing jobs we really don't want over here anyway," Garraty said.

Advanced manufacturing is what the state is interested in now, he said.

"There are courses out there that employers are starting to ramp up, but they need people with skills that know how to operate these high-tech machines that are in manufacturing.



GARRATY

That is where training comes in," Garraty said.

Each year, the department receives funding for industry partnerships where employers in the same area and industry come together to discuss skill gaps that need to be addressed. Both, the industry and the Department work together to fund training programs to raise skill levels, Garraty said.

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