

Jobs, Jobs, Jobs in Evanston and Beyond - Evanston RoundTable

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Kevin Brown, the City's Community Services Manager, chats with youth in line at last year's Summer Youth Employment Program.

RoundTable *photo*

By Mary Helt Gavin

Summer jobs for Evanston youth may be more plentiful this year than in previous years, thanks to sustained outreach to potential employers by City staff and collaboration among Six Flags Great America, Metra and the City of Evanston.

The annual job fair will take place from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. on March 12 at Evanston Township High School, 1600 Dodge Ave. It is open to Evanston youth ages 14 to 18 years living in zip codes 60201 and 60202.

Many employers will be represented this year: Northwestern University, The Talking Farm, Home Depot, Evanston Township High School, Hyatt House Evanston, C&W Market, YoFresh Yogurt Café, the McGaw Y, the Salvation Army, Steak & Shake, Jewel, Target, Valli Produce, Ebony Barber Shop, Hecky's, McDonald's, Starbucks, Cutting Edge, Jiffy Lube, TCF Bank and Actors Gymnasium are among the businesses that have already signed up to interview the hundreds of youth expected at Saturday's job fair, said Porschia Davis, assistant program manager for the City's Youth and Young Adult Division.

In some cases, the summer job can expand into a year-round job, Ms. Davis said.

"We've had a lot of support from Home Depot and Best Buy. We're also looking at CVS and Walgreens," said Kevin Brown, Community Services manager for the City. A business that does not have space for a summer employee can still make a donation to the City, so the City can hire additional youth, he added.

Last month and earlier this month, The Youth Job Center and the City held several Resume & Interview Skills workshops to help youth come prepared for the interviews, said Ms. Davis. "To make up for the fact they gave two-and-a-half hours of their time, we're letting them jump the line at the job fair," she said.

This will be the second year for Six Flags Great America, which has said it hopes to hire 1,000 Chicago-area youth to work this summer at its theme park in Gurnee.

Last year, City staff reached out to Great America, and representatives attended the 2015 Mayor's Summer Youth Employment Fair, hiring about 20 youth, said Mr. Brown. "This year, we made a pretty aggressive approach, and Great America thought it was a good venue. They felt that, because it is the Mayor's job fair, there would be support from the City," he said.

Transportation can be an obstacle for Evanston youth hoping to work at Great America. Because of lack of transportation, Ms. Davis said, only about 20 of last summer's hirees were able to work the entire summer. According to various websites, for \$5 a person can ride a train and then catch a bus and then walk, arriving at Great America from Evanston in just over two hours. A car ride would be about 36 minutes.

Already, Great America and the City are at work to address the transportation challenge. "Mayor Elizabeth Tisdahl has gotten a concession from Metra to get 50% discounts for Evanston young people that participate in the Mayor's Summer Youth Employment Program and take Metra," Mr. Brown said. Great America provides a shuttle between the Metra station and the park for its employees. Also in the works is the possibility of having bus transportation directly from Evanston to the park, with the City and Great America sharing the cost, he said.

Mr. Brown says he hopes families will be willing to "get out of their comfort zone" and understand their children can get safely to a good job outside of Evanston. "I want the community to really embrace this," he said.

"Great America is a wonderful employer," Mr. Brown said. "They hire kids every single summer, and even provide housing for college students who work at the park. We can really create a pipeline [for continual employment]," he said, adding, "This will enhance the development of our children in ways you just can't without a job."

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