



Wednesday » June
27 » 2007

If you want a job, Alberta is your oyster

One-day search reveals myriad opportunities

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Calgary Herald

Wednesday, June 27, 2007

Remember your parents' advice, that you could be anything you wanted when you grew up?

Well, in Calgary's hot job market, truer words were never uttered.

In one day, during a purely hypothetical job search, I "landed" the following jobs as: a security guard, a hospital floor mopper, a coffee cart lady, a record store clerk and a lounge server.

Should I choose to leave my current line of work, I could become: a prep/line cook, a hotel housekeeper, a switchboard operator, a cashier at an organic food market; a marketing strategist; a copy writer/editor for a promotions company; a brand strategist; or a community relations advisor.

Wages for those jobs ranged from the \$7 an hour minimum wage to a \$100,000-plus salary, bonuses extra.

Here was my assignment: Spend a single day trying to find as many jobs as possible, in as many wage brackets as possible. The employers interviewed for this story knew the context of the job search.

Using the Internet, the newspaper classifieds, cold calls and headhunters or recruiters, I tracked down dozens of different jobs. The biggest hurdle was finding enough time in one day to research all that's available in Calgary's smokin' hot labour market. As a would-be employee, I was staggered by the information overload.

Did I mention that, for prospective employees, Alberta is your oyster? Here's a quick snapshot of the labour scene.

- Alberta has more \$100,000 per year job postings, per capita, than any other province, according to higherbracket.ca.
- Albertans do more passive job searches -- that is, more currently employed professionals trolling for new jobs -- than anywhere else in Canada (source: higherbracket.ca).
- Minimum wage jobs (\$7 per hour) were harder to find than you might expect. Readily available jobs -- many in the service, retail and hospitality sectors -- typically pay \$9 to \$14 an hour.
- On working.com, 2,786 local jobs are currently advertised, 257 of which pertained to the oil and gas industry.
- On monster.ca, more than 1,000 jobs are currently posted for Calgary.

So, heads up employers: You're not in the driver's seat anymore.

"It's very much an employee's market right now," said recruiter Jeff Alpin. "There's a shortage of skilled labour now. It's very, very competitive."

And, in the new reality, once employers hire those workers, they'd better treat them well.

"People don't typically leave companies, they usually leave managers," said Alpin, the Calgary vice-president of David Alpin Recruiting. "It's so important to stay highly engaged and connected with their employees." Employers need to offer lots of flexibility and vacation time, perks such as every second Friday off, good benefits and relocation packages ranging from \$5,000 to \$15,000 to sweeten the pot, he said.

Alpin pointed to one Calgary company that gave a \$1,000 cheque to each of its 100 employees. The surprise windfall was delivered on the Friday before a long weekend with a note thanking everyone for their hard work.

It was Alpin who helped me "land" my \$100,000-plus per year brand strategist job, even though I'm not entirely clear on the job responsibilities. I can learn though.

Looking for some serious money for yourself? Check out higherbracket.ca. Alberta has more \$100,000-plus jobs posted per capita than any other province in the country, said the company's CEO, Anthony Kaul, in Vancouver.

Some prospective employers were coy about even revealing their wage schedules to a reporter, given Calgary's competitive labour market.

At the Hyatt Regency hotel in downtown Calgary, the property has several job postings, but Pete Kangalee, the hotel's director of human resources, stressed they were not desperate for employees; the hotel is running just fine on its current staffing levels, he said, and it's been business as usual.

Some of the jobs available at the hotel include prep cook/line cook, restaurant and lounge server, housekeeper and switchboard operator.

Kangalee was reluctant to share the wage range for those jobs. "I don't want our competitors knowing . . . it's a dog-eat-dog world out there."

Other employers insisted, even in the face of Calgary's tight labour situation, they wouldn't just hire any warm body. At Intercon Security, the Calgary office is looking for 40 people to fill positions such as security officers, mobile patrol officers, alarm system technicians, alarm response staff and site supervisors.

"We're not just going to hire people that come through the door," said Rebecca Cansdale, manager of Alberta operations.

She said the company has a rigorous hiring process which includes testing, interviews and a police check.

The company pays between \$12 to \$18 an hour and after 90 days, new employees get a \$250 bonus, Cansdale said. If that new hire recommends another person and the new second employee stays for 90 days, both get \$250 each.

And if picking up a full-time job isn't what you want, there's always the Calgary Stampede, which starts next week.

"If you're really serious, I can get you a job down here at the park," Stampede spokesman Doug Fraser told me.

As of Monday, there were about 100 jobs still available at the grounds. The jobs -- mostly maintenance and security positions -- pay between \$8.75 to \$12.15 an hour.

New employees will be trained before their first shift, Fraser said, reminding me of one perk few other employers can offer these days: a free 10-day pass to the Stampede.

As Fraser said: "It's very much a perk."

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Need Work?

Here a few other jobs currently available in Calgary:

- On working.com, you can land a job as a line cook for \$14 to \$18 an hour; as a gas jockey for \$10 an hour, plus monthly bonuses and weekly contest incentives; as a juice bartender for \$10.50 an hour; as a landscaper for \$15 to \$25 an hour; or as a live-in nanny for \$7 an hour, to name but few of the jobs listed on the website, which is owned by CanWest/Global, parent company of the Calgary Herald.

- At calgary.craigslist.org a few of the jobs posted include: research assistant; lifestyle marketing intern; fashion models interested in a "very good opportunity for exposure"; Air Canada tarmac workers at the airport; and writers with "amusing and entertaining camping stories" to share.

- In the Calgary Herald's Classified section, one ad sought pianists to play for a millionaire in the evenings. No wage was posted and prospective players will have to audition.

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