

Feds' cash puts job counselors to work

By CARA SPILSBURY
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Unemployment offices in Haverhill and Lawrence will share \$282,936 to help put Merrimack Valley residents back to work.

Among the first to get new jobs will be employment counselors. The Valley Works Career Centers in the two cities will hire personnel to provide additional one-on-one counseling for job seekers, said Director Arthur Chilingrian.

The money is part of a \$4 million payment to Massachusetts through the federal stimulus package.

VALLEY WORKS CAREER CENTERS

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An additional \$4 million is expected in the next fiscal year, which begins July 1, said Gov. Deval Patrick.

The money will be used by the Valley Works Career Centers to improve direct services, Chilingrian said.

In addition to the computer labs, training programs, job listings and other resources available at the career center, more one-on-one counselors means those served by the career center can get more personalized help with their resumes, interview skills and with job searches.

"The better services we can provide them one-on-one, the quicker we can get them off unemployment and back into the world of work," Chilingrian said.

Re-employment Services programs kicked off last November. More than 37,000 people are enrolled statewide. The Merrimack Valley centers have seen over 3,000 job seekers combined since February 2009.

Chilingrian said the Valley Works Career Centers have placed about 180 people in jobs since July.

In addition to the RES programs, the Valley Works Career Centers help job seekers obtain unemployment insurance benefits and additional education, such as GED programs.

"We're very busy," said Chilingrian of the Haverhill and Lawrence centers. "We have 16,000 people coming through our doors every year."

The amount allocated to each center was determined by the state Department of Workforce Development based on unemployment claims in

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each region.

According to the state Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, the Haverhill region, which includes an area from North Andover to Amesbury, had an unemployment rate of 8.3 percent in November 2009, the most recent period for which such numbers are available. The rate remained

steady from October, but was up substantially from one year ago. The November 2008 rate was roughly 5 1/2 percent.

The Lawrence area, which includes Salem, N.H., and Methuen, was 12.8 percent for November 2009, more than 13 percent for October 2009, and 8.7 percent for November 2008.

The state average in November was 8.3 percent, up from 5.8 percent in November 2008.