

Hundreds attend first day of local job fair *The Kentucky Standard* – 2009 by Lydelle Abbott

Only a little more than an hour into its first day, the SYKES job fair had more than 400 applicants interested in working for the company.

SYKES Enterprises, a customer support outsourcing company, announced last week that its newest state-of-the-art call center will open in Bardstown in the fall. The Tampa, Fla.- based company will set up shop in the Kentucky Home Square Shopping Center in the former Winn Dixie building and intends to employ 450-500. The majority of jobs will be customer service representatives with positions starting at \$9 per hour with competitive benefits.



Susie Wichman, Bardstown, said the process took her about an hour and a half before the interview, which she decided to schedule at a different time. Laid off at the end of June, Wichman said she has looked for a job, but two employment agencies she tried weren't taking anyone.

“So, I'm just hoping,” she said.

Kim Hickman, Bardstown, arrived an hour and a half before the fair was set to begin to put in her application. Unemployed since last year, Hickman said she has been sending out resumes and interviewing with no luck. “It's a good opportunity for Bardstown,” she said of SYKES.

Those interested in working for the company should expect to spend a couple of hours at the job fair. Applicants will go through a three-step process, Andrea Burnett, director of corporate communications for SYKES, said.

First a video on the company's history and culture is shown. Second there is an educational session in which specifics of the Bardstown operation and roles of the positions will be explained and questions will be answered.

The last step is filling out the application and being interviewed or setting up an interview.

“It takes some time, but we want everybody to be informed about who we are and what we do,” Burnett said.

Don Noblin, operations administrator of the Bardstown Office of Unemployment and Training (OET), said everyone who comes into his office has received a flyer for the event.

“It's a tremendous opportunity for Nelson County and surrounding area,” he said.

Noblin said the company's move to Bardstown will help to boost the economy, especially in the face of the newest unemployment figures released by the OET.

Kentucky's seasonally adjusted preliminary unemployment rate for June 2009 reached a 26-year high of 10.9 percent from a revised 10.7 percent in May 2009, according to the OET. The number is 4.5 percentage points higher than the 6.4 percent rate recorded in June 2008. The number is also 1.4 percent higher than the nationally seasonally adjusted jobless rate of 9.5 percent in June 2009, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

“We are grateful they chose Bardstown; it's been needed for a long time,” Noblin said.

The company aims to have the call center operational by October and management positions will be filled as soon as August, Burnett said. Training for customer service representatives will begin around mid-September and last for about nine weeks to allow employees to be knowledgeable and comfortable with their positions, Burnett said.

The job fair, which began Thursday, will continue 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. today and 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Saturday in Jideco Hall at the Mitsuba corporate office, 950 Withrow Court, Bardstown.