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Contact: Stacy Morse
(573) 751-3599

Urgent Update: Assistance for Displaced Hospital Workers

At one time, health care was touted as one of the career fields that could withstand economic turmoil. The fallout from the historic recession changed all that, as another St. Louis hospital is putting people out of work.

One of our area's major employers, Forest Park Hospital, has announced a major layoff that will affect about 300 workers by early April. This devastating job loss is a part of the hospital's merger with St. Alexius Hospital. Yet that doesn't make it any less distressing for all of the workers and families whose lives have been turned upside down. As a result, Forest Park Hospital will only contain a small emergency department and psychiatry unit moving into the future, which is a far cry from the medical need the community deserves.

This kind of economic damage requires a swift and thorough response to minimize the impact on those who are now out of work. A program called the Missouri Rapid Response Program, coordinated by the Missouri Department of Economic Development's Division of Workforce Development, is the key tool in this response.

The Rapid Response Program provides information and assistance in order to alleviate issues caused from losing a job. When the layoff announcement was made, the Rapid Response team was put in touch with the employer to develop a series of meetings to talk to employees and make the transition as smooth as possible. This team includes a small group of the affected employees to serve as peer counselors for fellow workers.

Representatives from many state agencies, such as the Dislocated Worker Program and the Division of Employment Security, stay on-site to provide face-to-face information on specific questions the workers may have.

This human touch approach is often a welcomed comfort. Many people have trouble navigating the maze of offices and filings one needs to complete when a job is lost, and for many, there are usually other concerns to worry about, like updating a resume, or maybe even finding out how they pay the next month's bills. The Rapid Response Program is an excellent way to make that transition easier, getting people back to work and helping them start a new chapter in their lives.

For more information, visit www.rapidresponse.ded.mo.gov, or contact the Missouri Department of Economic Development at 1-800-877-8698.

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SENATOR JOSEPH KEAVENY
4TH SENATE DISTRICT
CAPITOL BUILDING, ROOM 329
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65101



OFFICE:
(573) 751-3599
WWW.SENATE.MO.GOV/KEAVENY