

Penguins hiring Penguins



It's become an annual tradition: hundreds of Clark College students showing up to meet potential employers as graduation looms near. But while Clark's Career Fair has become a familiar part of the academic cycle, not everyone realizes how many of those employer booths are staffed by former Clark students—some of whom attended the fair themselves, once upon a time.

Leslie Matheney, an HR generalist for Burgerville, remembered attending the fair before graduating from Clark in 2008 with her associate degree. "At the time, I wasn't really ready for it," she said, noting that she had just been looking for part-time work as she geared up to transfer to WSU Vancouver, where she earned a bachelor's degree in human resources and personal psychology.

Matheney, who was at the May 3 fair to recruit seasonal crew

members and managers, said she felt being a Clark graduate helped her when she did start looking for full-time, permanent employment. “I think, especially because I was looking for a position at a local company, it was good,” she said. “I think that Clark is really well respected in this area.”



Sgt. Fred Nieman stands with a colleague at the Clark County Sheriff's Office table.

Sergeant Fred Neiman, who was recruiting for the Clark County Sheriff's Office, said that his workplace also values the diversity of Clark's student body. “What we look for is folks who have a variety of education and background,” he said. “You deal with all kinds of people in public safety. So to have a background of diverse education and experiences, and knowing how to interact with lots of different kinds of people—that's valuable.”

Neiman has a long personal connection with Clark College. Not only did he attend classes here in the late 1970s, but he came back to work as its Director of Security for eight years. Clark is also where he met his wife, and their three children all earned associate degrees from the college.

“It's a wonderful institution,” he said. “I enjoyed attending here when I was a student, and I enjoyed working here when I

was an employee.”

Vicky Barnes also has a child who graduated from Clark. She earned her own associate degree here—with highest honors, no less—while he was still a teen.



Vicki Barnes

“I often got mistaken for a professor on campus,” laughed Barnes, who was at the fair to recruit for Woodland Public School, where she is the HR coordinator and district office manager. Barnes said she enjoyed her time as a Penguin, even though it meant long days—she attended Clark while working at WPS. “This is something I wanted to show my kids—that you can be a life-long learner.”

“It definitely benefited me in HR,” she said. “You learn how to engage with people, how to get out of your comfort zone.”

As if to prove this, she quickly turned to a woman eyeing her display of job descriptions to answer questions about open positions in the district.

According to Clark College Employer Relations Specialist Scott Clemans, 15 of the 110 employers who registered for this year’s fair indicated that they would have Clark College alumni present.

“Smart companies send alumni to events like these because

they're great role models and mentors for current Clark students," Clemans said. "The alumni show current students what's possible after college, and give great advice on how to achieve it. And of course, they relate to Clark students on a level that other recruiters simply can't."

Clemans added that the fair was an impressive success. "Not only did we have 110 employers registered to attend—the maximum the O'Connell gym would hold—but we had to create a wait list for interested employers and probably had about 20 more who were interested but contacted us too late to register," he said.

This year's job fair included not only employer booths but also a photo booth where visitors could get a professional portrait taken for their LinkedIn accounts. Leading up to the fair, Clark College Career Services also hosted numerous workshops and events, as well as the annual Career Clothing Closet, to prepare students and guests for the day. The fair, which is open not just to Clark students but to all job-seekers in the community, saw 923 visitors this year—up 15 percent from last year's attendance.

Top photo: Clark College/Jenny Shadley. Photos of Nieman and Barnes: Clark College/Hannah Erickson.