SUCCESS STORY – David Krzyston

originally printed in the Shepherd Express, October 12, 2010, by Harry Cherkinian

UW-Milwaukee’s Career Transitions Center helps in the search for jobs

It had been five years since David Krzyston voluntarily left the work force to care for his ailing parents. After they had passed, he decided to look for a job. But much had changed in the workplace, including a decrease in opportunities in his field of industrial sales.

“I ended up selling cars at a low-paying job, working for people 25 to 30 years younger than myself,” says Krzyston, 56.

As a young man, he went straight from high school to a company where he worked for 17 years. He also had been self-employed. Decades later, he says he had much more to learn than just new training.

“You lose the social skills” when you’re out of the workplace, he says. “There’s something you get by going to work every day, seeing people. When you cloister yourself, it works against your self-image. You’re not as confident.”

Krzyston’s fiancée worked at UW-Milwaukee and gave him a brochure on the Career Transitions Center (CTC) at UWM’s School of Continuing Education. At first, the idea of attending career counseling at a university seemed daunting.

“At my age, I couldn’t even imagine it,” he recalls. But he found the administrators helpful and says they took an interest in him “right from the get-go.”

Krzyston received one-on-one career help with interviews and résumés, and took personality and skills tests to determine his true interests.

“The biggest challenge to it all is telling yourself you can do it,” he says.

“You either work for yourself or against yourself.”

Krzyston worked with CTC Program Director Yolanda White, who helped him find the programs and career counseling that best suited his needs. White has worked with many people during the current recession and says that attitude plays a key role in moving forward.

“Nobody’s coming knocking on your door” in this economy, she says. “I get calls from people laid off who can barely have a conversation through the tears. I’ll hear, ‘I’ve never done an interview before,’ or, ‘I’m too old for this—where do I go from here?’”

That question is becoming more common. When White started with the program three years ago, she had fewer clients. The CTC currently has 180 participants.

White, a 1994 graduate of UWM, recently received the 2010 Milwaukee Times Black Excellence Award for Community Service. Her dedication to helping others is evident as she talks about how the CTC and School of Continuing Education help people of all ages.
“Last year, I started seeing younger people, out of school for two to three years, coming back to try and figure out what to do next,” she says. “We also have quite a few people come in and they haven’t done a résumé in 30 years and they need to put food on the table.”

What was once a four- to six-month “transition” between jobs is now averaging six to 12 months, White says. To help with that transition, she matches participants with one of the CTC coaches based on job needs and personality. White also works at finding job leads that she can provide directly to CTC participants.

White’s first success story came from helping a participant who had left the Private Industry Council. He now works as deputy managing director for the city of Philadelphia.

Stories like that give hope to people like Krzyston. In addition to attending school full-time, he is working part-time in a field that is aligned with why he left the work force in the first place: health care.

Krzyston found that the home healthcare experience with his parents actually played to his interests as well as his job skills. He currently works part-time with an Alzheimer’s patient while studying to become a nurse. His projected graduation date is May 2013.

“They [CTC] helped me discover what I really wanted to do,” he says. “They helped me see the possibilities.”

For more information on the Career Transitions Center and other programs at UWM’s School of Continuing Education, call 414-227-3200 or visit www.sce.uwm.edu.

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