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The Story of a Job Lost, and a Job Sought, in Giant Letters

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BRIDGEPORT

For the last eight months, Pasha Stocking, a laid-off marketing and sales director, has been sending out résumés, attending job fairs, registering with temp agencies and doing “everything else possible” to try to find a job. Finally, after no real prospects, she decided it was time for “one last, big try.”

She took \$2,000 she had saved to use toward a down payment on a house, and instead rented space on a billboard on northbound Interstate 95 in Bridgeport. The imposing 14-by-48-foot billboard, with her likeness and the phrase “Hire Me” in giant letters, looms over drivers.

“I’m a single mother with three kids. I needed to be working yesterday,” said Ms. Stocking, 37, who lives in East Hampton. “I had to put myself out there for them and myself. I love to work and can pretty much do anything. I’m hoping the billboard was a good investment.”

She said she chose Bridgeport for the billboard because she believes Fairfield County offers the best opportunities for a midlevel marketing or executive assistant position. Before she was laid off in July, she was director of sales and marketing for a crisis management training firm in Middletown.

An executive at [Lamar Advertising Company](#), which rented Ms. Stocking the billboard, said he was surprised that more people were not doing the same thing.

“With jobs the way they are, you need to set yourself apart and give yourself an edge,” said Paul Macari, vice president and general manager of Lamar’s Fairfield County office. “This is a great way to do it.”

State [Department of Labor](#) statistics count 96,382 unemployed Connecticut residents for the two-week period ending April 2, the latest statistics available. That’s close to a 90 percent increase from the same period in 2008.

Labor Department officials would not comment on Ms. Stocking’s billboard. But Linda Kobylarz, a veteran career consultant whose clients, among others, include the state’s [Department of Economic and Community Development](#), sees it as a sign of the times, so to speak. “Extreme times call for extreme measures,” she said.

Ms. Kobylarz, the secretary of the [National Career Development Association](#), said she sees the billboard as a “gigantic cold call” and is “intrigued” by Ms. Stocking’s willingness to take a chance.

No doubt that anyone looking for a job needs to invest in his or her self, Ms. Kobylarz said. But while

innovation and creativity are key qualities that many employers look for, only rarely do they replace proven experience and skills, she added.

“Getting noticed may get you in for the interview, but then you need to show you have the skills to get the job done,” Ms. Kobylarz said.

Mr. Macari said that while Ms. Stocking’s billboard is the first of its kind he has seen in Connecticut, similar “hire me” billboards have cropped up elsewhere. Ms. Stocking, in fact, got the idea and the advice from [Mark Heuer](#), a Milwaukee resident who made national headlines for advertising himself on a similar billboard last month.

A strong believer in networking, Mr. Heuer used his experience to guide Ms. Stocking not only on how to create a cost-effective billboard, but also what information to include on her accompanying Web site, [hirepasha.com](#).

“One thing I’ve learned in life is that help can come from the weirdest places,” Ms. Stocking said. “Who would have thought that a guy from Milwaukee might be the one who helped me change my life? But he gave me a lot of great advice, including how to offset the huge cost of the billboard space.”

Those cost-saving measures included Ms. Stocking’s 16-year-old daughter taking the photograph for the billboard and Ms. Stocking using self-taught graphic skills to design it.

So far, Ms. Stocking said, she has received some offers for entry-level positions that she said she would consider if it came to that. But she said she could not afford to live on minimum wages.

“I know things might not work out the way I want them to, but I can’t think about that right now,” Ms. Stocking said, with her eyes full and her voice cracking. “I’ve put myself out there and now need to be confident that something great is going to happen.”

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