

## Construction job fair in Tampa draws thousands of applicants



Jeff Harrington, Times Staff Writer

Thursday, March 25, 2010 3:29pm

TAMPA — Rich Zahn ordered 2,000 hot dogs to feed job seekers at his construction job fair, figuring he'd have several hundred left over.

He underestimated just how hungry the area's depleted construction industry is — for jobs.

Before the hiring event kicked off at 10 a.m. Thursday, several hundred people had lined up at the construction fair set up on an open field at Cass Street and Nebraska Avenue. And the crowd continued to grow.

Before the fair ended at 3 p.m., organizers estimated the turnout at between 4,200 and 4,700.

"It's triple what we thought. We had to get another 1,700 hot dogs," said Zahn, head of ZMG Construction of Longwood, which is hiring workers for Encore, a \$458 million urban renewal project near downtown.

He called the surge of applicants bittersweet. Sweet because it provided a strong pool of candidates to choose from as the company hires 900 to 1,100 workers for Encore's first phase over the next six months. Bitter because it underscored how Florida construction has been hit harder by the Great Recession than any other industry — almost cut in half since 2006, with the loss of more than 300,000 jobs.

Applicants included brick masons, concrete workers, electricians and framers. Some, like 20-year-old Kenneth Allen II of Tampa, had no construction experience, just a desire for a job. Any job.

For two years, Allen has worked for temp agencies and cut yards, but struggled to find full-time work. In filling out a form, he did all he could think of to stand out. "I put a star by my name," he said.

Some laid-off construction managers and superintendents clutched referral letters and resumes in their hands. But that degree of detail wasn't necessary at this stage. The line moved briskly, with applicants dropping off a one-page form and moving on to the hot dogs and drinks. No interviews or lengthy discussions.

Zahn walked the line, telling clusters of 15 to 30 people at a time to expect to get a call within a couple of weeks. To



JOHN PENDYGRAFT | Times

*Willie Turner, 40, looks over a long line of applicants during a job fair for an urban renewal project called Encore on Thursday in downtown Tampa. The turnout was triple what organizers expected.*

check a Web site for their status. That his company will need to hire 4,700 people eventually over the next two to three years. By 1 p.m., Zahn estimated he had repeated the speech about 25 times.

He told applicants their odds were better here than at a typical job fair, where perhaps one out of 10 gets an offer. With the need for immediate hires and a second round later, up to 25 percent could get an offer, he said.

Tampa Bay's unemployment rate for January was 13.1 percent. February numbers are being released today.

**Construction job fair in Tampa draws thousands of applicants 03/25/10**

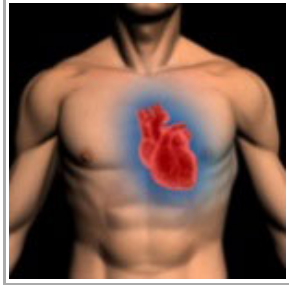
---

© 2013 Tampa Bay Times

### Sponsored From Around the Web



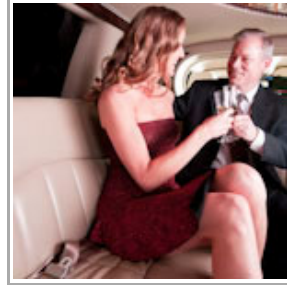
A New Solution That Stops Snoring and Lets You Sleep



Rare Discovery Could Extend Your Life by 30 Years



How Cruise Ships Fill Their Unsold Cabins



How Penny Stocks Create Millionaires Every Day



Hot Pictures of Kaley Cuoco, The Beauty Dating Tennis Star Ryan Sweeting