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CENTRAL TEXAS EMPLOYMENT

Tech job fair attracts 900 people

Door64.com organizers help prospective technology workers connect with companies

By [Lori Hawkins](#)

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

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Since losing her job as a technical writer at Freescale Semiconductor Inc. in February, Wanda Hill has focused on networking her way into her next position.

"They say 80 percent of jobs are never listed — you find out about them through the people you know, and that means you've got to get out there," said Hill, who was a contract worker at Freescale for four years and is now looking for a full-time technical writing position.

The networking message seems to be resonating: Hill was among 900 people who crowded the Goodwill Community Center in North Austin on Thursday for a tech fair sponsored by Door64.com, an Austin Web site dedicated to helping technical workers connect and share job leads.

The event included back-to-back career sessions as well as a showcase of 37 high-tech companies with Central Texas connections. Although few were hiring, the goal was to display the range of technology the region has to offer, said Matt Genovese, who founded Door64 two years ago. The group, whose events are free and open to all, has grown to 4,000 members.

"It's no secret there is a lot of tech talent out of work right now, and many are new to the idea of building a personal network," said Genovese, who is conducting his own job search after being laid off from his chip design engineer position at Freescale earlier this year. "A lot of people are open to new career paths, but getting started isn't easy."

A session titled "From Employee to Entrepreneur" drew a standing-room-only crowd. Kevin Koym and Jonas Lamis, founders of startup incubator Tech Ranch Austin, led the session focusing on turning a layoff into an opportunity.

"Many of the jobs that have been lost are not coming back, and a lot of people aren't getting to ask that question, 'Is entrepreneurship right for me?' " Koym said.

If becoming an entrepreneur is currently the best alternative to being unemployed, "the right question to ask is 'What's the business I should be designing around myself?' " he said.

Koym suggested, rather than asking "Is my idea any good?" ask "Can I sell it or not?"

Lamis recalled how for him, a layoff from an executive marketing position at an Austin software company paved the way to launching a consulting firm that he had long wanted to start.

"Rather than freaking out when I got laid off, I credited myself for getting fired instead of quitting," Lamis said. "There are benefits to getting fired: You can hopefully negotiate a severance, and there are unemployment benefits and the opportunity to extend health care," Lamis said. "I used the firing to point out to company executives where the gaps would be without me. Then I said, 'Why don't you hire me back on a retainer for the next few months.' "

The company did just that, and Lamis' consulting firm had a way to pay the bills as he sought more clients.

Sharon Williams, a long-time technical writer, was among those at the tech fair who are ready to start a new career. Her goal, she said, is to be a life coach.

"The jobs in technical writing have really dried up. They're viewed as dispensable, and many are being outsourced," Williams said. "When I told my friends I was going to really take a stab at this, they said, 'That's what we've been telling you!' So now I'm ready to listen."

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