

BIG OPPORTUNITY: More than a thousand vacancies will be on offer at major Hopes are high that jobs fair could wipe out unemployment across Chelmsford

IN NUMBERS...

1,000

— number of jobs up for grabs at city's first employment fair from 12 major firms



700

— the estimated number of insurance giant Amlyn's workforce in the future after it built a new HQ next door to the Premier Inn with plans to double its 350-strong workforce

450

— the number of jobs at Chelmsford's Bond Street shopping mecca, anchored by John Lewis



90

— the number of jobs expected at Waitrose when it is finally built at the old Royal Mail site in Victoria Road, Chelmsford

38

— the number of jobs created when budget hotel Premier Inn opened in Victoria Road last August

90

— the number of jobs created when bargain home retailer B&M opened at the former Tesco Homeplus store near the Army & Navy last summer

80

— number of jobs expected when High Chelmer's al fresco dining area opens with four restaurants



By Sam Balls

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JOB hunters are being urged to attend a "game-changing" careers fair that could wipe out unemployment in the city if more than 1,000 vacancies are snapped up.

Chelmsford JobCentre Plus has teamed up with Chelmsford College and the city council to organise an employment extravaganza that aims to encourage leading firms to recruit skilled local people.

World-renowned technology firm e2v and retail giant John Lewis are just two employers invited to next Friday's Jobs and Skills in Our City event, hosted at the Meadows Shopping Centre, with organiser Steve Hyde saying it could drastically alter the city's employment landscape.

The JobCentre Plus employer advisor said: "Chelmsford is really going places and our event strapline of 'new city, new job, new future' really reflects that notion.

"The city's infrastructure is constantly improving, more and more houses are being built and with companies like John Lewis coming to the city, it's just a fantastic opportunity.

Mecca

"This event is a great way for people to meet employers in an informal setting, out of the office environment.

"Hopefully it will allow job hunters to be themselves, network and get to know prospective employers, which can often be an intimidating prospect in different circumstances."

The latest government figures show there are currently 1,061 unemployed people in the Chelmsford borough and 788 people out of work in the city constituency, which equates to just 1.2 per cent of the workforce.

But with the £120 million John Lewis development on the horizon — the Bond Street retail mecca is set to open this autumn — and a host of firms clamouring to set up shop in the city, Chelmsford is becoming overloaded with vacancies.

Chelmsford MP Sir Simon Burns told the Chronicle he will be attending the event on Friday, February 5, which runs from 10am to 4pm, and hopes residents don't shirk the opportunity to find work.

He said: "This is a great opportunity for our city and people should grab it with both hands. I attended a similar event last year and there will be a lot of extremely helpful people there.

"We are fortunate in Chelmsford in that we have seen a steady decline in unemployment figures over the last few years, but that doesn't mean to say that we should become complacent."



EXCITED: Organiser Steve Hyde



APPRENTICE: Leah Reuben

Event organisers have invited a total of 12 employers to the fair, including representatives from the NHS, logistics firm the Woodland Group, McDonalds, First Bus as well as Stansted Airport recruiters.

One 19-year-old who knows all about the apprenticeship process is former Sandon School pupil Leah Reuben, who started at the Woodland Group in September.

Invaluable

The Chelmsford College student, from Great Baddow, said: "People disregard schemes because of the low wage, but the practical experience I'm getting is invaluable and I hope to stay on here when I'm qualified.

"I feel like I'm doing something more productive than sitting in a classroom all day and all my colleagues are really supportive. I couldn't recommend an apprenticeship enough because it has given me such a good platform to do well."

The jobs fair comes as the city council continues to create its housing master plan for the 2021 to 2036 period, to build 14,000 new homes, which will inevitably increase Chelmsford's

population to more than 200,000.

Freda Mountain, shadow cabinet member for planning and economic development and strategic housing at Chelmsford City Council, added: "I imagine there are gaps in certain industries that desperately need specifically skilled workers and this is a great way to match them.

"It's good for the city to see what skills are on offer out there to help plug the gaps. If people don't turn up, they'll never know what they're missing out on. I do see a lot of vacancies advertised at the moment and I don't see any reason why they shouldn't be being filled."

Sian Thomas, of Chelmsford College, said: "We will be there for people who want guidance on how best to develop their skills, so we'll be there talking about the benefits of apprenticeships.

"We want people young and old who are looking for work to get involved as we've got employment opportunities from the health care sector to logistics, manufacturing and construction.

"Chelmsford is a modern, thriving city and anyone is welcome to come down and see us."

TAKING PART...



event, the same number as are out of work in city



COME AND SEE US: Some of the employers who will be at the big jobs fair

WHAT YOU SAY...

Reporter Tom Bage interviewed people outside Chelmsford's JobCentre Plus.

Laurent Gilmore, 29, Writtle, Masters Graduate

"Even though I'm highly educated, up to master's level, I'm still finding it very hard to locate work in Essex, in Chelmsford, because the work isn't very varied, it's all very office-based stuff. With respect that can be, to some people, quite basic. But with the high demand for office-based work at the moment I find that everyone seems to be making the same applications.

"Although I find myself in the privilege of having had a higher education, those who haven't had a higher education will be finding the same difficulties as

which I am afflicted to at this point in time."

George Scholes, 23, Danbury, Unemployed

"It's quite hard to get a job at the minute, but maybe I'm just not trying hard enough, I don't know."

Adam Ferguson, 20, Springfield Road

"The fair is going to give people opportunities to get an idea of different jobs whatever they may be. It's about encouraging people isn't it? I know I'm going into the fair with an open mind as that's what you have to do."

Healthcare and digital industries represented

THE Essex Employment and Skills Board (ESB), which represents industries such as healthcare, digital technology and IT, is another service provider supporting the event.

The board aims to recruit for a variety of sectors including programming, coding, nursing and care work via its Education & Industry STEM programme.

ESB vice-chairwoman, Alison Calnan, of Ford Motor Company, said: "It is important that both our current and future generations understand the immense opportunities that our sectors have to offer locally, and that they get the chance to make the most of it by being aware, and having valuable skills.

"Some jobs within our sector will be showcased today



SUPPORT: Alison Calnan, the vice-chairwoman of ESB

through e2v technologies, Woodland Logistics and Stansted.

"The ESB are proud to support this event."

IN BRIEF

Book your place for hospice ride

COUNTYWIDE: There's still time to sign up for a hospice charity bike ride. Pedal for the J's returns to

Chelmsford on Sunday, May 1. The event, sponsored by Beaulieu developers Countryside, saw more than 1,000 cyclists tackle 15, 30 or 50 mile routes around the city last year. To find out more or to book your place, visit www.thejshospice.org.uk

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