

# Crowds turn out at job fairs for Saraland call center

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The energy at Bishop State Community College's technology center Wednesday afternoon was more an like an "American Idol" audition than a job fair.

"So you got the job?" Leida Javier-Farrell, director of the Mobile Area Chamber of Commerce's Center for Workforce Development, asked applicants exiting a room labeled "close-out" — where offers were made and agreements were signed.

In response, most of the people waved their folders in the air. Some jumped up and down and embraced friends and family.

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Atlanta's Ryla Teleservices Inc. hired hundreds of people during job fairs, one at the University of Mobile near Saraland on Tuesday and one Wednesday at Bishop.

Ryla plans to open a call center in Saraland by the end of June, filling a building on U.S. 43 that had been used by Hertz Corp. for a similar operation. Hertz now has its employees working from home.

State and local governments will grant Ryla incentives estimated at more than \$8 million, including \$6.5 million in training services from Alabama Industrial Development Training, a two-year college system arm.

The Ryla operation is expected to employ 1,200 people by 2011, with about 500 employees the initial target, said Tanya Joseph, director of operations. Joseph said she is confident that most of those early positions will be filled, thanks to the two fairs.

"We will be close," she said, guessing that about 300 people had been hired through the job fairs.

Lasting from 8 a.m. until 7 p.m., the fairs — consisting of orientation, computer skill testing, interviews and job offers — attracted more than 400 applicants each, Joseph said.

The Bishop event drew a range of applicants, from silver-haired grandmothers to young rocker types, all hoping to land jobs that Ryla has said will pay an average of \$21,754 a year, or \$10.50 an hour.

One successful applicant was Tracy Jackson Kennedy, a 24-year-old mother of four from Mobile. She accepted a team leader position.

"It's hard to find a good job in this economy, and my husband's hours have been cut," said Kennedy, a business major at the University of South Alabama who plans to continue school part time. "I'm just so excited about this opportunity. I can't wait to start."

(Business Reporter Jeff Amy contributed to this report.)