

Economic forum has advice for surviving downturn

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FAIR LAWN – Don't panic, you can still get help buying a home, building a business or finding a job.

That was the message Wednesday at the Fair Lawn Economic Resource Symposium, where panelists from government, academic and business fields gathered to provide resources about everything from small business loans to home ownership seminars.

The impetus was to provide valuable information in dire fiscal times, said Fair Lawn Mayor Steve Weinstein, who helped organize the forum.

“We have all these organizations in the county, and they're kind of secrets,” Weinstein said. “We wanted them to come out and show people.”

Federal stimulus dollars will fund programs such as incentives for first-time home-buyers and financial aid opportunities at Bergen Community College, officials said.

The college has programs that can help retain workers in growing fields such as green construction, said Susan Johnson, vice president of continuing education and community outreach at the college.

“These affordable, fast track programs get people working immediately,” she said.

If you're looking for a job, the key thing to do is to advertise your skills and be flexible, said Tammy Molinelli, executive director of the Bergen County Workforce Investment Board. If you have a job, keep working hard, she said.

“If you want to keep your job, make sure you're positioning yourself in the organization in a way that makes you valuable,” she said. “You can't complacently go through your day and do mediocre work.”

For small business owners, low-interest loans are available from county sources, as well as regional organizations such as the Fair Lawn Economic Development Corp., which offers low-interest loans and grants. In addition, small businesses should look to resources such as the Small Business Development Center at Bergen Community College, which offers advice for business owners, said its director, Vince D'Elia.

Sixty percent of business for North Jersey Media Group, which owns The Record, comes from downtown businesses, said company President Stephen A. Borg, who served as master of ceremonies.

Borg, said the company was offering opportunities such as providing discounts to advertisers in special improvement districts and continuing an editorial focus on downtowns.

“It’s important that we continue to let people know about the depth and diversity of Bergen County,” Borg said.

The symposium wasn’t without pessimistic moments, such as when Bergen Community Development Director Joseph Rutch talked about an upcoming home ownership fair.

“You’ll be able to meet banks and mortgage brokers – if there are any left,” Rutch said.

But for the most part, panelists put on a positive face about the economy. D’Elia did this by reading headlines reporting job creation and rebounding home markets in some areas of the country.

“The economy is cyclical and will resurrect itself when consumer confidence goes up,” D’Elia said.

“Don’t drink the Kool-Aid. Don’t panic. Economies go up and down.”