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Hundreds line up for gas-drilling jobs in Pa.

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TOWANDA, Pa. -- Workers looking to cash in on the Marcellus Shale are lining up.

More than 200 of them, resumes in hand Monday, waited in the parking lot of the Riverstone Inn in Bradford County, where Chesapeake Energy recruited workers as it intensifies natural gas production in northern Susquehanna County.

Inside, hundreds more circulated, shoulder to shoulder, waiting to shake hands and pitch their credentials to representatives from Chesapeake and various contractors.

Engineers, plumbers, machinists, laborers, truck drivers and a legion of other job seekers, 99.9 percent of them men, came from throughout the Twin Tiers, including Broome and Tioga Counties.

Some were already employed and looking for an upgrade. Most were simply looking for any kind of work.

"This is kind of in my field," said Eric Williamson, 46, an unemployed industrial plumber from Kunkletown, Pa., who was decked out in a tailored suit and tie. "I'm looking for a change, too," he added, explaining how more than 20 years' experience with pipes, valves and other hardware will serve him and his prospective employer well.

Chris Bobik, 47, an unemployed electronics worker from Endicott, drove the hour and a half to make a similar pitch. Not about plumbing, though. He has more than 20 years' experience in electronics manufacturing, most recently with the Endicott firm Catalyst.

Tom Nichols, a 28-year-old welder and crane operator from Horseheads, said he is fine with the physical labor required to work on a drilling rig for 12 hour-shifts, seven days a week.

A Man Camp -- a gated dormitory-style compound for drilling crews -- could also be in his future. Chesapeake is proposing the camp in Athens, Pa., to house crews migrating from the south and west, and to train newcomers to the industry.

The job fair began at 1 p.m. As of 3 p.m., recruiters had seen close to 600 people who filed through the small inn, said Brain L. Grove, director of Corporate Development for Chesapeake. At 4 p.m., a Chesapeake representative addressed about 150 people still waiting in line outside, asking them to fill in paperwork in the parking lot and visit the company's job recruitment page. Chesapeake was still interested in hearing from them, even if they didn't make it inside.

"We wanted to meet as many local people as we can," Grove said.

The jobs are mostly blue collar, he said, but also include some professional and administrative positions with opportunity for advancement across the board.

Since the beginning of the year, Chesapeake's labor force in Pennsylvania has increased from 200 to 700, with a similar growth trend expected through 2011, company officials. It's expected to have 40 rigs in operation in the next year or two -- more than twice the current number -- with 165 Marcellus wells targeted for 2010.

The Marcellus, one of the country's largest natural gas reserves, runs under the Twin Tiers and throughout the Appalachian basin. Since 2007, it rapidly has gained popularity among energy

producers as they honed technology to effectively harness it. That includes horizontal drilling and a controversial process called hydraulic fracturing, which uses a pressurized chemical solution to fracture bedrock to stimulate gas flow.

Hydraulic fracturing, fracking for short, requires vast amounts of water and raises questions about waste disposal and handling. Because of those concerns, permits are not being issued in New York until the state Department of Environmental Conservation completes a review of environmental impacts, possibly by early next year.

Meanwhile, firms like Chesapeake, Cabot Oil & Gas and Fortuna Energy are focusing operations in northern Pennsylvania.

Monday's job fair was organized by Chesapeake and some of its principal contractors, including Nomac Drilling.

For more job information, go to www.chk.com and click on careers.
