

## BUSINESS

# Food businesses seek to fill hundreds of jobs at Melville job fair



Lyke Joenez of Mastic Beach, right, chats with Maya Miranda of Europastry USA Tuesday in Melville. Credit: Danielle Silverman

**By James T. Madore**

james.madore@newsday.com [@JamesTMadore](#)

*Updated October 20, 2021 5:00 AM*

Dan Ziegler on Tuesday attended his first job fair in 10 years, having lost his management position in Manhattan at the height of the coronavirus pandemic.

The 52-year-old Patchogue resident was among about 50 job seekers who showed up in the first hour of a two-hour job fair for restaurants, food and beverage manufacturers and other members of the local food industry.

"I came today because I need to start having conversations, to see what opportunities are out there for me," Ziegler said at the Island Harvest food bank in Melville, which hosted the job fair.

Recruiters from more than 25 employers stood under tents behind tables filled with fliers touting job openings. Fair organizers said it was being held to alleviate the chronic shortage of food-industry workers due to the pandemic.

Dan Ziegler of Patchogue chats with Liliana Veras of Europastry USA Tuesday in Melville. Credit: Danielle Silverman

"We are facing challenges in finding talent," said Liliana Veras, a recruiter for bread manufacturer Europastry USA in Ronkonkoma. The former Wenner Bread Product Inc. employs more than 370

people and is looking to fill 50 to 60 jobs, many of them in production, she said.

"We're trying to attract younger generations and we'll train you in our processes," Veras said.

Job seeker Kevin Vinzant said he worked for Europastry/Wenner Bread as a materials handler until 2015. He has since been "on social services, but I'd like to get a job," he said.

Vinzant, 54, planned to return to his Patchogue home for research on the employers that he spoke with and then to submit his resume in hopes of securing a job interview. "I'd like to be

## Get the Biz Briefing newsletter!

The latest LI business news in your inbox Monday through Friday.

Sign up

By clicking Sign up, you agree to our [privacy policy](#).

a materials handler again," he said.

Many recruiters said COVID-19 has made it more difficult to attract and keep workers. Some are seeking higher pay and job security while others want more vacation and other personal time, the recruiters said.

"Workers didn't return out of fear of catching COVID, others had increased family obligations and some left Long Island," said Erin M. Norton, director of talent management for Whitsons Culinary Group, an Islandia-based provider of meals to schools and other institutions.

"We're short staffed," she said, adding the company employs 600 people locally and has about 100 open positions.

Before the start of the job fair, recruiters heard about funding and training programs available from fair sponsors: the Long Island Food Council, Empire State Development, Stony Brook University's Manufacturing and Technology Resource Consortium, Workforce Development Institute, Workforce Development Board of Oyster Bay, North Hempstead and Glen Gove, and the state and Suffolk County labor departments.

"I urge you to develop a pipeline of workers for the future," said Suffolk County labor commissioner Rosalie Drago. "We're going to continue to have a problem [filling jobs] if we don't bring in young people" for internships and eventually full-time positions.

Among the job fair's younger attendees was Austin Verdejo, 22, of Oceanside who graduated from Molloy College in May with two degrees and works in a jewelry store.

"I want to get more business experience, to build my resume because I'd like to go into game development and design," Verdejo said.



**By James T. Madore**

[james.madore@newsday.com](mailto:james.madore@newsday.com)  [@JamesTMadore](https://twitter.com/JamesTMadore)

James T. Madore writes about Long Island business news including the economy, development, and the relationship between government and business. He previously served as Albany bureau chief.

**Didn't find what you were looking for?**

search newsday.com



