

## Berkshire Newsmaker » Six questions for Heather Boulger of the Employment Board ...

**Help wanted:** For 20 years, Heather Boulger has kept an eye on the Berkshire job market, and says there's now more cause for optimism if you look at it the right way. As executive director of the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board, she oversees a web of programs with the primary aim of connecting job seekers with employers, a process that includes people at various points in their life — from high school students looking for a summer gig, to recent graduates launching their career, to mid-career folks looking for a change. Eagle correspondent Christopher Marcsiz talked with her this week about how the job market has changed.

### 1 You began as as a summer youth employment counselor 20 years ago. What have you noticed has changed about summer jobs in that time?

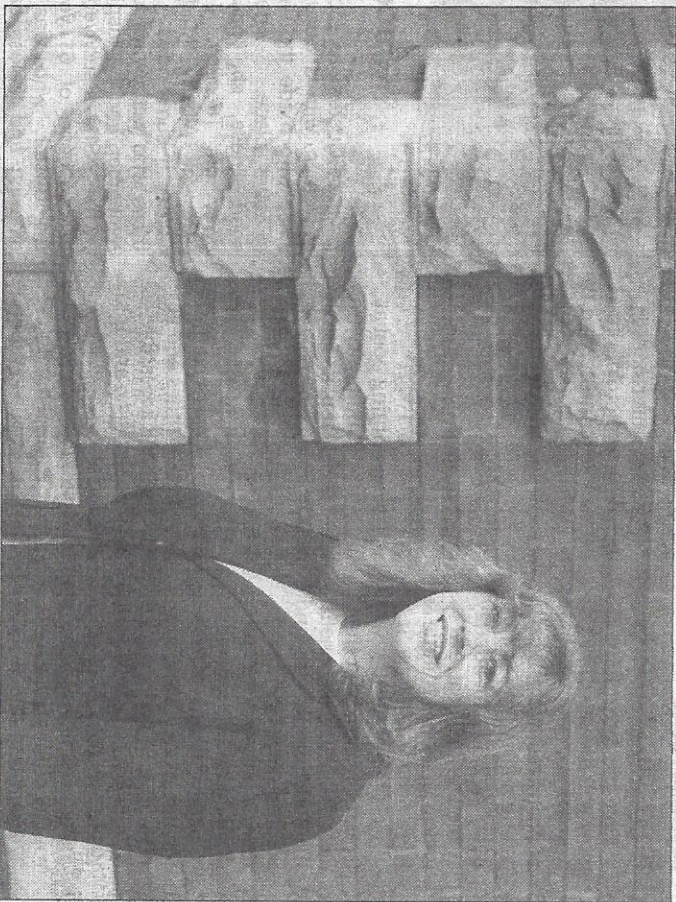
When I started in the 1990s, there were 3,000 kids as part of our summer youth employment program, and now there's 60 kids countywide as part of our federal initiatives. [The board] has been advocating for additional resources and opportunities. Because we know that when a young person has a summer work experience, it helps keep them out of trouble, in school, and gives resources to their families. It really helps keep them engaged and learn about civic and social responsibility.

### 2 Is it harder now to find summer work?

We're finding that it's hard to find young people who want to work. A lot of parents don't require their kids work, unlike when I was growing up, when it was part of my parents' wanted us to have that responsibility. I think the expectations have changed. We actually have more job opportunities for young people than people who want to work, at least in the subsidized program.

### 3 Right now there are a lot of new graduates joining the workforce. What advice to have for them, if they haven't yet found that first job, or the right first job?

I would say there are a lot of opportunities out there, especially in Berkshire County, where there are 1,976 job openings as of [this past week]. Those range from high-level skilled engineering and nursing jobs down to sales and production workers. The job is out there, but recent graduates or others not happy have to be persistent and patient, and constantly look for that ideal situation. They need to network, they need to tell everyone they know they are looking for a new opportunity, because most jobs are found through networks. Not as many are found from job boards or postings — maybe 15 to 20 percent. I also recommend they constantly upgrade their skills. Keep enrolled in training programs, or take some classes to keep their skills sharp, that's really



BEN GARVER — THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE | PHOTOS: BERKSHIREEAGLE.COM  
Heather Boulger, executive director of the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board at the 1Berkshire building on Allen Street in Pittsfield.

important as well. Be persistent, be patient, and the right opportunity will hopefully happen.

### 4 Are there particular tools or resources that job seekers don't think about?

The website [BerkshireWorks.org] is a one-stop career center. There are listings, weekly workshops to help people freshen up their resumes and cover letters, workshops on how to use social media, how to dress for success. They host career fairs and job fairs to connect employers with job seekers, they do targeted recruitment. There are resources, whether you're a 14-year old looking for their first work experience, a college student coming back to the area, or a mature worker who wants to switch careers.

### 5 What kind of mis-takes do you hear about from employers?

The feedback we hear is to be prepared when you go to an interview. Dress for the position, be confident but not arrogant, turn your cellphone off. Especially with young people, it's important to have the young person do the advocating for themselves, not their parents. Really, that's it. A lot of companies are finding that people don't show up for interviews, and don't bother to call to say they aren't coming. It's really critical to keep that line of communication open with that company. There are a lot of opportunities out there for the person motivated to work, and there are still a lot of unemployed. We can't make people be motivated to want to work.

### 6 What would you say to someone from around here in their 20s or so, who just gives up and says there are no opportunities here and wants to move South?

I would say there are opportunities in Berkshire County and Massachusetts. I'd also say it's OK to go away and explore opportunities elsewhere. We find a lot of those young people want to come back here when they are ready to start a family. There are opportunities here — utilize BerkshireWorks and other resources to find them — but it's OK to go away and get experience and bring it back here to help the county thrive.