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Cities announce jobs stimulus

FUNDS: Long Beach is among municipalities joining in $6.3 million for training programs.

By Karen Robes Meeks, Staff Writer

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LONG BEACH - Job loss. Store closures. Small businesses trying to stay afloat.

Whether you live in Long Beach, one of the state's largest cities, or in Lomita, a municipality of about 2 square miles, communities large and small are feeling the effects of a tumbling economy.

"Like all California (cities), our residents are jolted by the loss of jobs," said Lomita Mayor Pro Tem Don Suminaga, who says that 800 of his city's 21,000 residents are without jobs. "We all share a common challenge of addressing the residents' needs in this time."

To help address their cities' needs, Long Beach, Lomita, Signal Hill and Torrance leaders gathered Wednesday to announce plans for the $6.3million in economic stimulus funding received by Pacific Gateway Workforce Investment Network.

Pacific Gateway, which serves those four cities, estimated that more than 30,000 people in its coverage area are out of work.

"This is a great way to put stimulus dollars to work," said Long Beach Mayor Bob Foster. "I can tell you the four cities are squarely behind this. We think this is a fabulous effort and we hope for much success."

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds, in addition to Workforce Investment Act money, will allow Pacific Gateway to help 2,000 to 3,000 more residents get much-needed job training and counseling at one-stop career centers in Long Beach, Torrance and San Pedro.

The network will dedicate nearly $3 million of those funds to worker assistance, including the retraining of laid-off workers and temporary financial assistance.

The network also will put about $2.3 million toward finding employment for young people and intends to hire 1,200 youths ages 14 to 24 from the four cities this summer. The network is looking for youthful applicants and businesses to put them to work. The network will pay for wages, manage payroll and cover workers compensation insurance.

"This is a great opportunity for our youth," said Torrance City Councilman Bill Sutherland, adding that ExxonMobil has a similar youth work program.

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About $1 million will focus on supporting small businesses through several programs, including an outreach effort called Your Next Hire.

Foster, who spoke about his experience as a former small-business owner, said programs such as Your Next Hire will help raise awareness of resources such as information about tax credits and job training, and help forestall layoffs.

"This is part of putting people back to work," Foster said. "And I couldn't think of a better way to start than the engine of our economy - which is small business - to be able to assist them in being a much better business, to be able to thrive as a business and obviously to be able to hire more people so we can put people back to work."

Visit www.pacificgatewayworkforce.com for information.

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