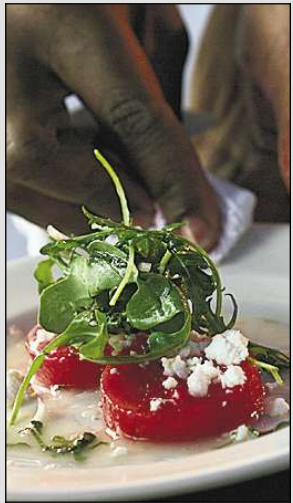
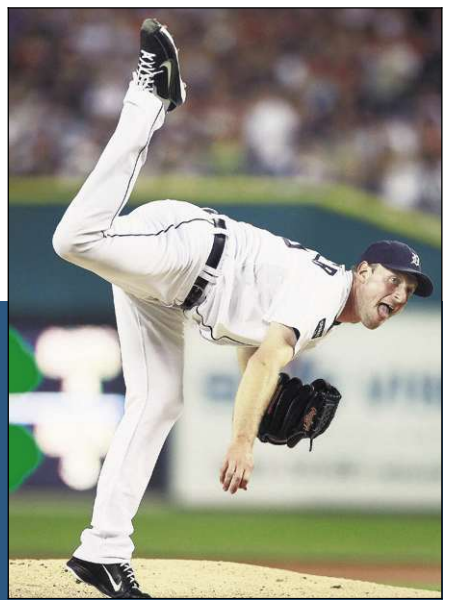


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SUSAN TUSA/Detroit Free Press

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WORK WANTED – DESPERATELY

Steady paycheck a memory for thousands in Michigan



WILLIAM ARCHIE/Detroit Free Press

Tom Drobny, 51, of Sterling Heights carries water to the concession stand before the beginning of the Sterling Heights/Utica High school football game. Drobny, who lost his job in December 2008, works as a handyman and volunteers at the school.

Aggressive searches and new skills haven't led to success for many metro Detroiters

By KATHERINE YUNG
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

Part 2 of 2

At the age of 40, Tamara Holland lives with her parents in Southfield. On the east side, Tom Drobny is painting houses after two decades of working as a market research professional. And in Dearborn, Robert Jensen turned to Social Security disability benefits for help.

These Michiganders and millions of other long-term unemployed workers around the country are doing whatever they can to survive years without a steady paycheck.

Most are relying on family and friends for financial support and shelter. Many are doing a variety of

Inside

■ Three Michiganders talk about their search for work. 6A-7A
■ Experts suggest ways the government could help. 7A

At freep.com

Read the first day of this series, see more photos and share your own stories. And join a Web chat at noon Tuesday with Michigan employment experts.

cash-only manual jobs like mowing lawns and cleaning gutters. And untold numbers of long-term jobless workers are receiving food as-

sistance and other government and charitable aid, fearful that they are one step away from homelessness.

"It's been a roller coaster," said Jensen, a former national distribution manager at Snap-on Tools who has been out of work since March 2007. "You go from being valuable to someone who's paying you six figures to do that work for them and then you are unemployed and no one wants to pay you anything."

Yet other than extending unemployment insurance benefits, the U.S. has yet to take any major steps to address the plight of the 6 million long-term jobless workers, the highest number since the end of World War II. And with many state governments scaling back social

See **JOBLESS**, PAGE 6A

freep.com

LIVE STREAMING AND COVERAGE TODAY OF OBAMA'S SPEECH AND UPDATES VIA TWITTER @FREEP

Detroit speech to test Obama

FREE PRESS STAFF

As President Barack Obama takes the microphone in Detroit this afternoon to speak to a Labor Day crowd of unionists fresh from their annual march of solidarity, he's under growing pressure to deliver strong solutions to the nation's and the state's most nagging issue: high unemployment.

He's saving his big message on that issue for Thursday night when he speaks to a joint session of Congress, but his words after today's parade with many titans of organized labor on hand are crucial, too.

James P. Hoffa, president of the Teamsters, said last week that government efforts so far have not worked to stem unemployment. He called on Obama to pressure corporations — he highlighted Apple — sitting on piles of cash but making little investment in U.S. jobs.

Beyond the high jobless numbers, 2011 has been the toughest year public employee unions have faced in decades. The most dramatic battles have been in Wisconsin and Ohio, but Michigan's public-sector unions are under pressure, too, to pay much more of their health care costs and, in some cases, to take wage and other compensation cuts.

So far, Obama administration officials have hinted only that the crowd will hear more about the president's role in rescuing General Motors and Chrysler from liquidation.

■ **WHY OBAMA HAS FENCES TO MEND WITH LABOR. 9A**
■ **EDITORIAL: WELCOME TO JOBS CRISIS' GROUND ZERO. 11A**

If you want to go

Who: President Barack Obama is to deliver a speech today in a parking lot just east of Detroit's Renaissance Center (enter at the corner of Rivard and Atwater). Aretha Franklin and Detroit's Mosaic Youth Theatre will sing before the speech.

When: Speech is expected to start at 1:15 p.m.; gates open at 10 a.m. Arrive early to assure a spot.

What to expect: Airport-style security. Have picture ID and limit personal items. No bags, sharp objects, chairs, umbrellas, liquids or signs will be allowed in the speech area.

Traffic: Expect delays in and near downtown Detroit immediately before, during and after the speech. Obama has no other planned stops in Michigan.



President Barack Obama

MICHIGAN'S COLOR-BLIND COMMUNITY

Blacks and whites have lived peacefully in Covert Township dating back to the 1860s

By ZLATI MEYER
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Covert had something to hide.

As far back as the 1860s, officials of the quiet, rural township dutifully reported their numbers of public school students to Lansing to qualify for state funds. What they did not report was that those students were black and white, studying side by side, which would be unheard of in Michigan for decades to come.

This summer marks the 145th anniversary of the arrival of the first African-American settlers in Covert Township

and, in a state where racial issues have long been a source of tension and trouble, the start of a remarkable, enduring and, for Michigan, rare story.

Today, the township — due west of Kalamazoo on the shores of Lake Michigan — maintains one of the most stable, integrated populations in the state.

"We just didn't have what the outside world had," said lifelong resident Paul Bryant, 75, a descendant of one of the first black families to move to Covert. "We had respect for each other."

■ **RARE ISLAND OF HARMONY. 4A**



WILLIAM ARCHIE/Detroit Free Press

Paul Bryant, 75, of Covert Township is a descendant of one of the first black families to move to Covert. "We had respect for each other."

New Catholic schools opening in suburbs

By PATRICIA MONTEMURRI
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

For the first time in a long while, things are looking up for Catholic education in metro Detroit.

One year after St. Catherine of Siena Academy enrolled 10 girls in ninth grade in temporary offices, it will start the school year Tuesday in a \$17-million, state-of-the-art facility on Napier Road, just south of I-96, in Wixom. St. Catherine is the first from-the-ground-up Catholic girls high school built in the six-county Archdiocese of Detroit since Mercy High relocated from Detroit to Farmington Hills in 1965.

And last month, near Ro-

meo, 10 students began ninth-grade classes at Austin Catholic Academy, the start of a coed Catholic high school in northern Macomb County.

Since 1998, Catholic schools in the archdiocese have declined from 170 schools with 56,862 students to 99 schools with 32,000. The two recent openings serve Catholic families in surging areas of Oakland, Livingston and Macomb counties.

"It really is a cause for celebration," said Bernadette Sugrue, the Archdiocese of Detroit's school superintendent.

■ **DEMOGRAPHICS PLAY ROLE. 2A**

■ **UDM'S 1ST LAY PRESIDENT IS ON A MISSION. 3A**

JOBLESS: Even part-time work is scarce

FROM PAGE 1A

service benefits and programs, fewer resources will be available to help these Americans regain their footing.

"You are seeing more people that need services that didn't need them before," said Dona Ponепinto, a vice president at United Way for Southeastern Michigan, which this year has seen a 23% jump in requests for assistance with food, utility payments and other basic needs.

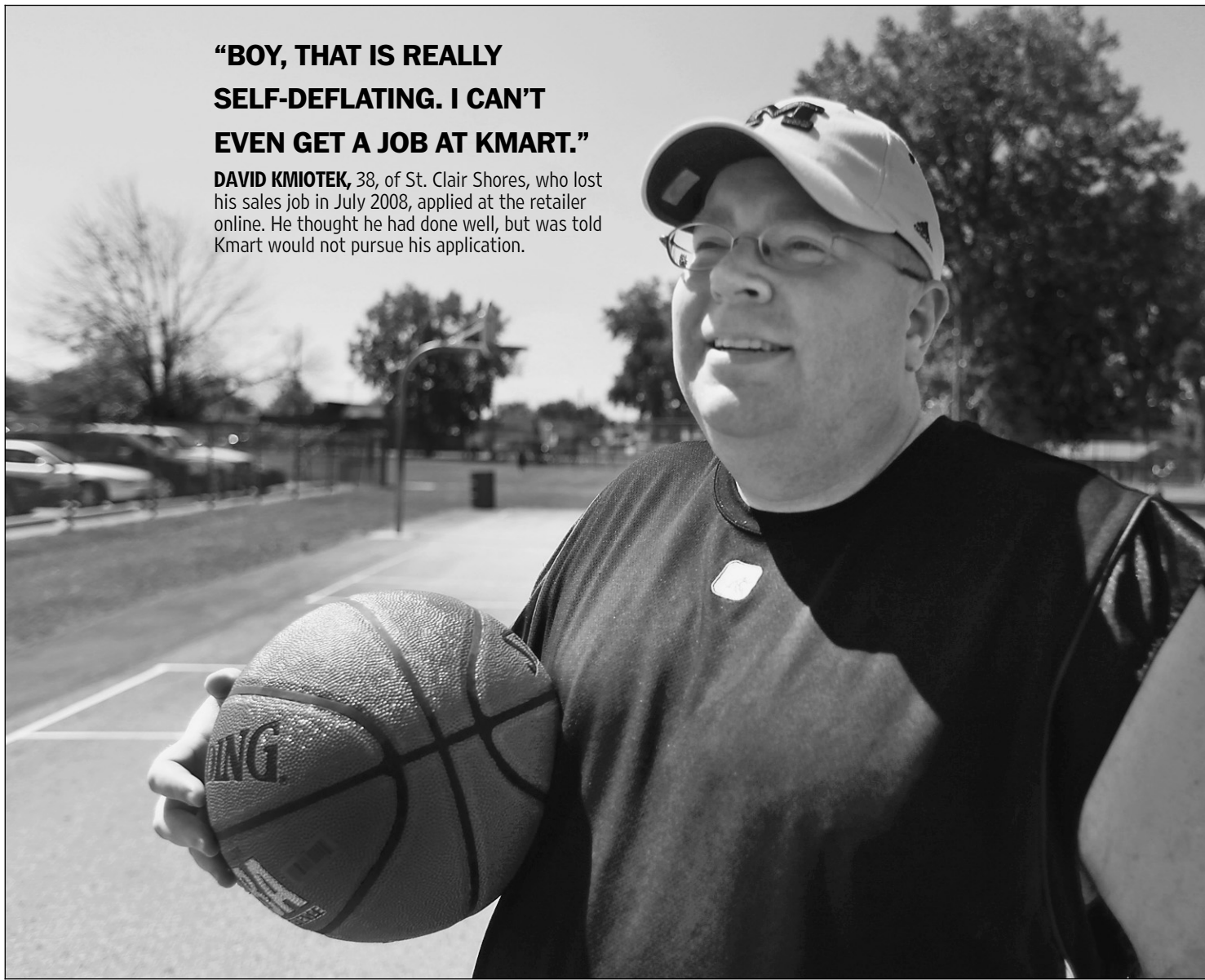
In the most brutal U.S. job market in decades, nearly a million people have given up searching for work, too discouraged to press on. After all, to keep looking requires a special kind of perseverance and a thick skin.

David Kmíotek of St. Clair Shores has learned this the hard way. Since losing his sales job in July 2008, the 38-year-old has gone on many interviews, always dressing up in a suit, coming in prepared with questions and sending thank-you letters afterward. But most employers don't even bother to tell him that he didn't get the job.

"You really wish somebody would get back to you," he said. Kmíotek remembers only one person who did this. "I was literally floored. That was the happiest rejection I ever had."

Kmíotek's low point came the day he applied for a job at a Kmart. He took an online personality test and answered some questions involving different customer situations. He thought he had done well only to have the computer inform him that Kmart was not going to pursue his application any further.

"Boy, that is really self-deflating. I can't even get a job at Kmart," he remembers think-



WILLIAM ARCHIE/Detroit Free Press

"BOY, THAT IS REALLY SELF-DEFLATING. I CAN'T EVEN GET A JOB AT KMART."

DAVID KMÍOTEK, 38, of St. Clair Shores, who lost his sales job in July 2008, applied at the retailer online. He thought he had done well, but was told Kmart would not pursue his application.

ing.

Many long-term unemployed workers are trying to learn new skills because work they used to do has become less plentiful.

Nicole Champagne of Ypsilanti Township just started a certified nursing assistant class at Washtenaw Community College. During the last

three years, the former Realtor has not been able to get anything more than several short-term, minimum-wage jobs.

But switching careers involves taking on debt. A single mother, Champagne, 43, already owes \$19,000 in student loans she accumulated in order to get a bachelor's degree in communications, political science and general psychology from the University of Michigan-Dearborn and an associate's degree from Washtenaw.

Still, "I've got to do something," she said. "I love learning and being around people."

Even as they struggle to get job interviews or undergo retraining, people out of work for a long time also are fighting to keep their homes and cars, pay for food and utilities and stop credit card, student loans and other debts from spiraling out of control. Many seek help from spouses, parents, siblings and children. But as months without a regular paycheck turn into years, relationships can get strained.

That is happening to 57-year-old Kathy Qualls of Roseville. The divorced mother of three lives with her 28-year-old

freep.com

Web chat with employment experts

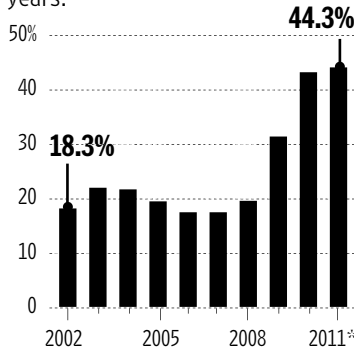
Join a Web chat at noon Tuesday with representatives from Michigan Works!, the state's Unemployment Insurance Agency, a metro Detroit job search expert and a labor attorney at the National Employment Law Project.

Share your story about joblessness

Have you been unemployed more than six months? Share your story by e-mailing getpublished@freepress.com or comment at freep.com.

The rise in long-term unemployment

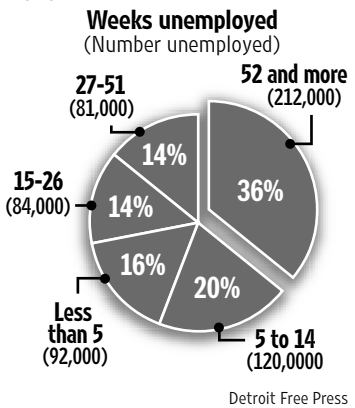
The percentage of unemployed workers in the U.S. who have been searching for a job for 27 weeks or longer — the federal government's definition of long-term unemployment — has increased dramatically in recent years.



*As of the second quarter of 2011.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Long-term jobless in Michigan

Last year, 36% of Michigan's 589,000 unemployed workers were jobless for 52 weeks or more, the third-highest rate in the country. Here's a breakdown of how long Michiganders were unemployed, using the most recent data from 2010:



Detroit Free Press

Adding new skills

Pharmacy tech training only leads to temp job

By **KATHERINE YUNG**
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

Unemployed since January 2009, Kathy Qualls believed that learning new skills would be her ticket to getting hired.

But six months after completing her training to be a pharmacy technician, the Roseville resident hasn't landed anything better than a four-week temporary job.

"It's just frustrating all the way around," said the 57-year-old, who has been dropping off her résumés at pharmacies and applying for jobs online.

In December, she finished the three-month pharmacy tech program at Macomb Community College, following that up with a six-week, unpaid externship at a CVS pharmacy. So far, she has had only two interviews.

Qualls and many other long-term unemployed workers are discovering that getting retrained only counts for so much in an economy with four job seekers for every new position.

The former office assistant exhausted her unemployment benefits in January and is getting hounded by creditors for her thousands of dollars

in debt. Her 28-year-old son, who lives with her, has been paying the mortgage on her house, but Qualls fears he may move out soon.

To survive, she has been getting food from her church and the Light-house Outreach Center, a charitable organization in Roseville. The divorced mother of three grown children has not applied for a state assistance Bridge card because she keeps thinking that she will get a job soon.

But so far, it has been one rejection after another. "It really affects your confidence," Qualls said. "You try to act like it doesn't, but eventually you start admitting it."

Qualls keeps trying. In mid-July, she got some short-term relief. For nearly four weeks, she delivered discount prescription drug cards to dozens of pharmacies around southeast Michigan. The temporary job paid \$15 an hour, plus reimbursement for the miles she drove in her nonair-conditioned van.

Getting a paycheck for the first time in 30 months was a small triumph, enabling her to pay a few bills.

"This is such a blessing," Qualls said. "I never felt this good about working before."

son, who has paid the small mortgage on her house since Qualls lost her office assistant job in January 2009. She paid most of the other bills until her unemployment benefits ran out at the beginning of this year.

"He's getting pretty fed up with it," Qualls said. "It affects our relationship. My son and I always had a great relationship. I'm hoping this is not going to change that."

Qualls is trying harder than ever to find a job.

For others, the loss of financial independence can be jarring, even though they are grateful for the support.

"Now every time I leave the back door, I have to ask for money," Mary Colletti of Huntington Woods said of her reli-

ance on her husband, who sells software. "It's dreadful. I hate doing it."

The 54-year-old lost her interior design project manager job at a health care company three years ago. This month, she will start a part-time job at an Ann Taylor store in Troy while she continues to look for design work.

Colletti is one of the lucky ones. Many people have not been able to get low-paying retail or restaurant jobs because of fierce competition for these positions. So they are trying to make a few dollars by doing small, manual jobs for people, such as shoveling snow.

Drobny of Sterling Heights is painting houses, installing water heaters and doing other manual tasks, using skills that

he learned from his father. The former market research project manager started out with one job for a family, and they told nine others about him.

"I don't mind the handyman work," said the 51-year-old widower and father of two, who lost his job in December 2008. "Some of it is tougher than I expected."

The Wayne State University MBA graduate is making less than half his former salary.

Tamara Holland of Southfield has been doing odd jobs for much of the last five years, everything from cooking gumbo and spaghetti for friends to cleaning houses.

Since losing her auto parts illustrator contract position at Ford in the summer of 2006, she also worked briefly for an apartment cooperative, an infomercial company and a T-shirt shop. But she hasn't been able to land a full-time, permanent job, even after receiving a bachelor's degree in English from Wayne State last year.

The 40-year-old, who moved in with her parents two years ago, now is giving teaching a try. She will start substituting this month at schools in Southfield and Berkley.

"I'm trying to make positive things out of nothing," Holland said. "Entrepreneurs and diversification of skills and talents is the only way that many people are going to survive in this economy."

But for many long-term unemployed workers, optimism is in short supply as they try to downsize their lives.

Robert Jensen of Dearborn no longer dreams of retiring at age 65 and escaping to the South during the winters. He has spent the last four years searching for a job.

Now 60, Jensen can't afford to retire early. He and his wife have spent about a third of their savings, and Jensen's unemployment benefits ran out more than a year ago. The couple took money out of their retirement savings account to pay off their house and their two cars.

Unable to find a job, Jensen, who has back problems, now is receiving Social Security disability benefits. The government assistance and the money Jensen's wife earns from a part-time school cafeteria job must cover property taxes, utilities, homeowners insurance, food, gasoline and other necessities.

The lifestyle the couple used to enjoy, which included new cars and vacations, has evaporated.

"We exist," Jensen said.

■ CONTACT KATHERINE YUNG: 313-222-8763 OR KYUNG@FREEPRESS.COM



REGINA H. BOONE/Detroit Free Press

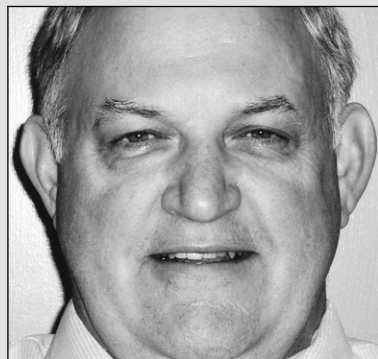
Kathy Qualls, 57, works in the garden at her Roseville home. Her 28-year-old son lives with her and pays the mortgage. Out of work since January 2009, Qualls trained as a pharmacy technician at Macomb Community College, but still can't find a job.

What jobless people say



“I’M TRYING TO MAKE POSITIVE THINGS OUT OF NOTHING. ENTREPRENEURS AND DIVERSIFICATION OF SKILLS AND TALENTS IS THE ONLY WAY THAT MANY PEOPLE ARE GOING TO SURVIVE IN THIS ECONOMY.”

TAMARA HOLLAND, 40, of Southfield, who lost her job as an auto parts illustrator in 2006. Two years ago, she moved in with her parents. She’ll start substitute teaching this month.



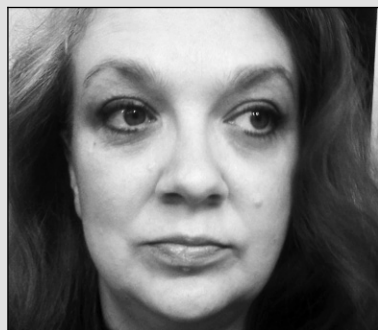
“YOU GO FROM BEING VALUABLE TO SOMEONE WHO’S PAYING YOU SIX FIGURES TO DO THAT WORK FOR THEM, AND THEN YOU ARE UNEMPLOYED AND NO ONE WANTS TO PAY YOU ANYTHING.”

ROBERT JENSEN, 60, of Dearborn, who has been out of work since March 2007 and now is on disability.



“NOW EVERY TIME I LEAVE THE BACK DOOR, I HAVE TO ASK FOR MONEY. IT’S DREADFUL. I HATE DOING IT.”

MARY COLLETTI, 54, of Huntington Woods, who depends on her husband after losing her job at a health care company three years ago.



“I’VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING. I LOVE LEARNING AND BEING AROUND PEOPLE.”

NICOLE CHAMPAGNE, 43, of Ypsilanti Township, a former Realtor out of work for three years. She now is in a nurse assistant training program.

‘Figure out a way to create jobs’

Experts urge government to act

But budgets are already straining

By **KATHERINE YUNG**
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

President Barack Obama and Congress face mounting pressure to reduce long-term joblessness before things get worse.

Congress’ Joint Economic Committee, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and others have expressed concerns that the U.S. is in danger of suffering from a prolonged period of high unemployment, similar to what some European countries have endured.

“The challenge for policymakers is to begin to cut into these high rates of long-term unemployment and to do so quickly,” a report from the Joint Economic Committee warned last month.

But Republicans, who control the U.S. House of Representatives, are determined to hold the line on more spending, leaving Obama with fewer options. In fact, unemployment bene-

fits are being trimmed in many states including Michigan, where beginning in January the number of weeks will be trimmed from 26 to 20.

Amid this reality, economists and unemployment experts offered two possible policy solutions. Most favor providing short-term wage subsidies or tax credits to employers that hire long-term unemployed workers. This is being tried on a small scale in some states.

In southeast Michigan, employers that participate in a \$12-million pilot program can receive 50% wage reimbursements for up to 6½ months if they hire someone who has been jobless for a lengthy time, said John Bierbusse, executive director of the Michigan Works office for Macomb and St. Clair counties.

But the federally funded effort, which is offered in other parts of the state as well, is limited to 192 workers,

and enrollment closes Sept. 30.

A similar initiative in southwestern Connecticut, led by the Work-Place, the area’s regional workforce development board, is trying to obtain jobs for 100 long-term unem-

ployed workers. It is using nearly \$600,000 donated by foundations, corporations and individuals.

Though the idea is far less likely to be used while Congress seeks deep spending cuts, some employment experts also urge the government to create a massive public service jobs program that would put millions of people back to work. This is the tool policymakers used to help combat the high unemployment rates of the Great Depression.

“The short-term problem is lack of jobs,” said Timothy Bartik, senior economist at the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research in Kalamazoo. “We need to figure out a way to create jobs.”

President Barack Obama is to speak on unemployment before Congress on Thursday night.

ALEX WONG/Getty Images



Willing to take a pay cut



Photos by WILLIAM ARCHIE/Detroit Free Press



Tom Drobny, 51, of Sterling Heights gets the band’s platform out of its van for the Sterling Heights-Utica High schools football game. A market research professional, he has been looking for work since December 2008. He’s a volunteer at the high school.

Former businessman is now handyman

By **KATHERINE YUNG**
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

He’s a 20-year market research professional with an MBA who has worked for a bank and two top market research firms. But Tom Drobny still can’t get a job.

Unemployed since December 2008, the Sterling Heights resident is willing to work for as little as \$40,000 a year. To quell employers’ fears that he will leave for better positions once the economy rebounds, Drobny has even offered to sign a contract stating that he will stay with a company for a

certain number of years.

“I want to work,” said the 51-year-old, who envies people he sees in the mornings going to offices, factories and stores. “To me, \$40,000 is better than zero.”

So far, nobody wants to take his offer. Drobny has been forced to do handyman jobs, mostly painting houses, but also things such as yard work and installing water heaters.

The demand for his services varies, spiking during the summer and plummeting in the winter. Drobny is making less than half of what he used

to earn. But the father of two, whose wife died of a brain tumor 13 years ago, has few options. His unemployment benefits ran out in February, and he is drawing down his savings and 401(k) retirement money.

To save his house, he managed to get his bank to lower his mortgage payments.

Drobny tries to keep his marketing skills up-to-date by reading industry journals and doing consulting assignments whenever he can. But sending out hundreds of résumés for more than 2½ years has taken a toll on his

outlook.

“There are days when I think I will never work as a businessperson again,” he said. “After a while, you see all the same jobs at all the different sites.”

This isn’t the first time Drobny has been out of work for a lengthy time. In 2003, he was laid off from J.D. Power and Associates when his department was eliminated. It took him 20 months to land a new position.

“Last time, I felt I would eventually get a job,” he said. “I don’t have that confidence this time.”

Eager, but overqualified

Debts rise without family to help

By **KATHERINE YUNG**
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

Among the millions of long-term unemployed workers, few are as vulnerable as those without a spouse or other relatives to rely on.

That’s the case with Janet O’Brien. At 32, the Ferndale resident has already experienced two layoffs and is back on the job market after a contract position that lasted about four months suddenly ended. Her parents died a few years ago, and her only sibling, a brother, can’t help.

“It’s me or nobody at this point,” said O’Brien, who lost her marketing and community outreach job at the Federal Reserve Bank’s Detroit office in March 2008. “I am my own support system.”

Last year, the only work she was able to get was a two-week temporary

job, calling people for a survey being conducted for a utility company. In 2009, she worked for about 30 days at a nonprofit group.

O’Brien graduated in 2002 from Oakland University and has a master’s degree in public policy from the University of Michigan-Dearborn.

In the last three years, she has attended hundreds of networking events and job fairs and applied for many jobs for which she is overqualified. She has had her résumé professionally done multiple times and signed up with dozens of temporary staffing agencies, taking numerous typing and other skills tests.

“You name it, I did it,” O’Brien said.

Rejection usually comes in the form of silence, with no phone calls or e-mails. When potential employers do send letters, they sometimes are ad-

ressed to “Dear applicant.”

Without a steady paycheck, O’Brien has racked up a few thousand dollars of credit card debt and had to borrow money from friends for emergencies such as two root canals.

So far, she has managed to hang on to her house because her mortgage payments are less than \$500 a month. She now is getting some unemployment benefits again. But if O’Brien doesn’t find a job soon, she will need to tap the savings in her 401(k) retirement plan.

O’Brien, like other long-term unemployed workers, has met people who don’t understand how she could be jobless for so long.

“They kind of think of unemployment as a disease,” she said. “It made people uncomfortable. I’m unemployed. I’m not dying.”



REGINA H. BOONE/Detroit Free Press

Janet O’Brien, 32, of Ferndale with her dog, Ashling. Jobless since March 2008, she has had to borrow cash from friends.