

'Action centre' for Deere workers opens

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With so few job prospects available in the midst of the recession, out of work John Deere Welland Works employees will need help to get back on their feet.

An "action centre" at 50 Division St. quietly opened its doors last week to offer the growing number of workers who are losing their jobs some assistance.

Tom Napper, president of Canadian Auto Workers Local 275, said getting the action centre up and running had been a big project, but one the union made a priority.

"Everyone's been working at it pretty diligently, and they've done a great job actually," he said.

Napper said the centre will offer former John Deere workers assistance with training, writing resumes, job searches, providing contact information for prospective employers "and getting the feel for what's out there and where the need is."

The centre will also help former employees sign up for employment insurance. Napper said "that will be a big asset for most of the people who have been working in the plant for years."

He said retraining opportunities will be provided, depending on an individual's needs.

But under current conditions, helping workers find new jobs won't be easy.

"It's just so depressing to be working with this every day," he said.

"There's nowhere you can send these people, because there's nowhere else hiring. ... Nowadays, there's just nothing out there."

The action centre is relatively quiet right now, but with many more layoffs expected in the weeks and months ahead, as the scheduled closure of the Dain City plant proceeds, Napper said activity will ramp up.

"Because Deere's laying off in stages, there are only a few people currently laid off."

At the end of next week, about 62 more workers will join the ranks of the unemployed. In July about 150 more people will be unemployed, Napper said.

"July will be the big one -- the end of July."

Layoffs will continue until the plant shuts down entirely by the end of the year.

As the need for the services increases, Napper said the number of people working at the action centre will also increase.

"We've got the people ready to go pretty much. They've all been trained."

The action centre operated by the CAW is jointly funded by Deere and Co. and the federal government.