

# Breaking the ice for future workforce

## Summer interns, employers, gather for networking session

By TONY DOBROWOLSKI  
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**PITTSFIELD** — Allan Gonzalez comes from New Jersey, goes to college in New York and is interning in the Berkshires this summer with General Dynamics Missile Systems.

The rising senior at Syracuse University likes it here — “it’s fun,” he said — and would like to improve his prospects for returning after he graduates.

On Monday night, Gonzalez was one of 55 summer interns who attended a “networking social” at the Country Club of Pitts-

field and met representatives of some 20 Berkshire firms.

A total of 97 people, employer representatives and interns, pre-registered for the event, though torrential rain trimmed attendance a little bit. According to a promotional flyer, more than 300 Berkshire County student interns had been invited.

Gonzalez, who is majoring in computer science, liked the concept of the event, saying he preferred meeting prospective employers face-to-face to sending an application by mail.

“It’s really important,” Gonzalez said of meeting employers in

person. “You’re getting to know people. If you just apply everywhere, your applications just stack up. This is better.”

The event was hosted by Lever, the North Adams small business incubator, which runs its own summer college internship program, Berkshire Business Interns.

Lever’s program, which pairs college students seeking summer internships with Berkshire firms, is in its second year. This was the first time Lever held a networking social.

“Our real goal for Berkshire Business Interns is to bring young people into entry-level jobs in the Berkshire region,” said Lever’s executive director, Jeffrey Thomas.

Berkshire employees face a shortage of young workers. A lot

of recent college graduates, particularly homegrown ones, move out, believing better-paying, career-oriented job opportunities are more prevalent elsewhere.

“We’re tired of people leaving,” Thomas said.

Berkshire workforce development organizations are taking steps to halt the outflow of young skilled workers — with help from the state. A Berkshire Workforce Skills Cabinet was formed two years ago in part to address this issue. Some of these efforts are paying off.

Thomas said some of the college students who were part of Berkshire Business Interns’ inaugural class last year were hired by the companies where they worked locally.

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## Networking

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Not all of the students who attended Monday’s event were members of the Berkshire Business Interns program.

It’s too early to tell if policies that seek to reverse the exodus of young people have taken hold.

“I don’t have any statistical information to back that up,” said Heather Boulger,

executive director of the MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board in Pittsfield, which helped put on Monday’s event. “But events like this will help.”

Representatives of Berkshire companies praised the format. Michelle Baity, director of human resources at Berkshire Family & Individual Resources in North Adams, said meeting interns in person gives employers better insight into candidates. Baity didn’t rule

out hiring somebody on the spot.

“You always keep the employment door open,” she said.

Grace Guachione of Pittsfield, who is also interning at General Dynamics Missile Systems this summer, said she had never heard of some of the local companies that sent representatives to the event.

A business/finance major entering her third year at Saint Anselm College in

New Hampshire, Guachione said she’s interested in staying close to home.

“I’m definitely a homebody,” said Guachione, a graduate of Miss Hall’s School in Pittsfield. “I’m looking to come back to Pittsfield or somewhere in Berkshire County.”

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