

Jobless man subject for prospective TV show

By [Kipp Hanley](#)

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Woodbridge, Va. - Taco Bell isn't hiring.

At least not people like Daniel Karnes.

A long-time government techie who has been without a job for close to three years, Karnes recently decided to give the Mexican fast-food chain a try.

The manager told him that he wouldn't be happy here, and that he would leave for a better job when he got the chance.

Of course he would, Karnes said. But that didn't make the manager's decision any less painful.

"It really hurts you when you get rejected by a fast food restaurant," Karnes said.

However, things may be changing for the better for Karnes and his wife, who have been living on borrowed time at the Hilda Barg Homeless Prevention Center since mid-May.

Karnes recently stumbled upon an advertisement on the internet for a yet-to-be-named television show. The idea behind the show was to take a few random jobless individuals, tell the public their story and then help them obtain employment through the assistance of job recruiters, resume builders and wardrobe up-grades.

At first, he thought it was a scam. But after making contact with Betty Sullivan—a Maryland business owner and the show's creator—Karnes was under the glare of television cameras at the shelter.

Soon afterward, he was heading out to acquire some professional threads. Courtesy of the yet-to-be-picked up show, Karnes walked away with two suits, three pairs of pants and a pair "shiny black shoes," he said.

And with any luck, he will be walking those shoes right out of the shelter and into a new life. He only has about three weeks remaining in the shelter and doesn't fancy living in his car.

"I've simply GOT to find something permanent or at least quasi-permanent very soon," wrote Karnes in an e-mail Tuesday.



{ John Boal/News & Messenger }

Daniel Karnes and his wife, Nancy, have been living at the Hilda Barg Homeless Prevention Center since May 7. He has been selected to appear on a new show documenting the difficulties of unemployment that is expected to air on The Learning Channel in the fall.

Tough time

Sullivan doesn't claim to be a human resource expert. But with 80 people working for her at Rock-ville-based Architectural Ceramics, she knows how to deal with people.

And she knows that there are many individuals out there who haven't had much luck obtaining employment, in part due to the economy.

"Before, if you didn't have a job, it was probably because you were doing something wrong," Sullivan said. "Now we have people without jobs that are highly edu-cated."

Karnes' education was a real-life one. He went straight from tinkering with anything electronic he could get his hands on as a child in Los Angeles to working as an electronic technician for California-based Sawyer Industries Corporation right after high school.

There he tested and repaired military and NASA Spec power conversion units for spacecraft, missiles and aircraft.

His final paycheck came in 2007 as a software engineer for Stanley Associates Inc. The Arlington-based company moved his job to Oklahoma that year and as a low man on the totem pole—he'd been there only a year and a half—he wasn't offered a chance to re-locate.

Karnes loved Washington and wanted to stay in the area, calling it his "Disneyland." He had worked for years for government contractors and loved being so close to so much history.

But without a full-time job, his life began to resemble less and less of the Magic Kingdom. He and his wife—who also has had trouble finding a job—couldn't afford their \$2,275 a month apartment in Ross-lyn any more.

After 26 weeks of unemployment ran out, Karnes began to sell his valuables to help pay bills. Eventually, they took off for Arkansas where they were able to live with relatives for just \$300 a month.

By November of 2008, they returned to the Washington area. But all his vast experience was still leading him nowhere. By this spring, they were forced to move into the Woodbridge-based shelter.

Doing what it takes

On the surface, Karnes appears like a confident, upbeat person and he hopes the exposure he receives from the show will help find a full-time job again.

But the last few years have been a test of his patience and evidence of his perseverance.

He knows of companies that have hired foreigners for a salary well below what his experience would have commanded. He's also seen an assortment of job ads that state that the applicant must be currently employed.

For the last few weeks, Karnes has succeeded in obtaining a few gigs for Office Movers. A man used to working on elaborate technological upgrades for his government employers, Karnes is now moving that hardware to places he can't get a job at.

He and his wife will use the money made at Office Movers to pay for minor car work so that it can pass the safety inspection and for Metro transportation for potential interviews inside the Beltway.

And he will continue to pump out resumes to perspective employers from his personal computer. His laptop was one of the few things Karnes did not purge from his previous life, a life in need of an extreme make-over.

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