

# Joseph Project Job Networking Ministry Says Farewell

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By [Kim Souza](#)

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Jim Shankle, left, talks with Chris Hass about their passions before participating in a panel discussion during the final meeting of the Joseph Project at the John Brown University campus in Rogers. The Joseph Project is a local mission that has helped more than one hundred people find jobs in the past two years.

NORTHWEST ARKANSAS — “Finishing Strong” was the motto shared Wednesday at the Joseph Project networking group in Rogers when the local ministry concluded meeting number 119 and said farewell after two and a half years.

“We began the Joseph Project in late 2008 as Main Street America was afraid their bank might fail tomorrow and jobs were being shed at historical proportions,” said David Roth, president of Work Matters, the local ministry that launched the Joseph Project. “We knew we needed to do something to help displaced businessmen and women alter their journey in between jobs.”

More than 700 unemployed people took part in weekly networking sessions since the mission began.

More than 200 of them found jobs and at least 10 others mustered the courage and sources needed to start their own businesses, Roth told the large crowd who gathered to celebrate the ministry’s success.

“We also knew if we stepped aside, it would allow others to step forward and continue this needed mission,” he said.

Larry Whisenant, Vicky Carroll and Jeff Watts, former volunteers and participants at the Joseph Project, are doing just that. The Open Doors Networking Group will conduct its first meeting Wednesday at the John Brown University campus in Rogers, the same time and venue used by Joseph Project.

“We felt it was important to continue the networking opportunity because there is still a great need to help the local unemployed,” Whisenant said.

No stranger to unemployment, Whisenant said the Wednesday meeting provides something to which job seekers to look forward.

“It’s a place to plug in and recharge,” he said. The advertising sales veteran joined the unemployment ranks in October.

The Joseph Project averaged 25 to 40 participants at its weekly meetings in recent months. Participants routinely get help with resume writing, interviewing skills, sales presentations and hear an uplifting message from guest speakers ranging from top-notch corporate executives to flourishing entrepreneurs.

“We aren’t the Joseph Project, but Open Doors does have a very similar mission and desire to keep the ministry alive for as long as it’s needed,” Whisenant said. “Our meetings will follow a similar format.”

Part of the reason Work Matters decided to wrap up the project is because Butch Scruggs, program director, landed a consulting job with a manufacturing start-up near Louisville, Ky.

“We had intentionally named it ‘Project’ knowing at some point we would end it,” Scruggs said. “The economy is picking up and jobs are more readily available.”

That said, he is delighted to hear the Open Doors networking group will continue the service.

“It was an ultimate privilege to serve in the Joseph Project for two years,” Scruggs said. “I made lifelong friends and relationships during that brief time. After decades of enjoying the fruits of others’ sacrifices, I had the unique opportunity to give back during my time with the Joseph Project.”

Mike Wolfe of Rogers was among 80 or so at the farewell session.

He was unemployed for 15 months between 2008 and early 2010.

“I began coming to the Joseph Project because it gave me something to put on my calendar after I lost my job,” Wolfe said. “In my middle-50s I was faced with starting over. The camaraderie I found with other displaced professionals was so uplifting. Through networking I was able to make valuable contacts that eventually led to a great job in the vendor world.”

About 18 months ago he accepted a sales manager position at C.P. Food Products, an international integrated seafood producer for major food retailers. Though most of the company’s operations are in Thailand, his job is based in Northwest Arkansas.

## **MEETING INFORMATION**

Bridging The Gap In Between Jobs

What: Open Doors Networking Group

Where: John Brown University Campus in Rogers, 2808 Ajax Ave.

When: Wednesdays 8:30 to 11 a.m.