

The well-known expression "getting out of dodge," is being used more commonly among Californians in relation to the rise in unemployment.

With the golden state's jobless rate hitting a staggering 12.5 percent, more people are considering moving out of California in hopes of finding a job. But according to Christopher Forum, 27, that may not be the best solution.

Just one year after earning his Associates Degree in Graphic Design, Forum was hired at Viscira, an interactive agency based in San Francisco as an assistant graphic designer. Three years later, in 2007, he received a generous offer from Georgia to join a start-up company just outside of Atlanta. Considering California's economic downturn and the lower cost of living further east, the West Valley College graduate accepted and left his life behind for Roswell, Georgia.

In early March 2010, the Labor Department of Georgia reported that the states seasonally adjusted unemployment rate rose to 10.4 percent in late February. Forum, now a resident of Georgia, is a part of these jarring statistics. Falling above the nation-wide average of 9.7 percent, Georgia is not a safe haven for those who are unemployed.

The California native became one of the 289,555 people to lose their jobs only one year after his move to the Peach State. Substitute Arrangements, the start up Forum joined in Roswell, failed before it gained any momentum as a result of the unfit economy. The out-of-work graphic designer states,

"When I got the offer, I figured it would be a smart move to get out of California before I fell victim to the failing economy. It seemed like such a good move at the time, financially speaking, especially considering the increase to my salary and the cheaper cost of living. But soon after I started the job...I began wondering if I made the right decision."

The company planned to sell bouquets of supplies and tools, similar to flower arrangements. Except in the place of flowers were various odds and ends that would appeal to it's recipient. A teacher might receive a bouquet of writing utensils, markers, erasers, and rulers. An expecting mother would receive an arrangement of baby clothes, bottles, rattles, and toys. But a combination of bad timing, financial problems, and a tough job market stopped the business from ever taking off.

“When I first started, it seemed really promising. People liked the concept...we had a really good thing going for us.” Forum says, “But the money just wasn’t there when we needed it. Bad investments made by the company endorsing us, the nation’s deficit, underfunding...I didn’t realize there was such a problem until I was caught in the middle of it. ”

Since Substitute Arrangements failed, finding another job in graphic design hasn’t been easy, and not having a university degree has only made it more difficult. The Mitty High School graduate landed a job out of community college with only an Associates Degree, but now that he can’t find a job in his field, he wishes he had gone on to further his education.

“In every interview I’ve been to, there are five other guys with college degrees that I have to compete with,” Forum says.

“When it comes to the firm making the rare decision to actually hire someone, who do you think it’s going to be? With the job market being as it is, you need something that makes you stand out...not having a degree does that, but not in my favor.”

The digital artist claims if he can’t find work in his field in the next few months, he will enroll himself in school and earn a degree. When asked what university he would attend, he responded,

“It doesn’t make a difference. Unemployment is a national problem; wherever you go, it’ll be there. You can run all you want, but there is no escaping it. I, unfortunately, learned that the hard way.”

So the question remains, is there anything left in the California dream? For many who have been affected by the unemployment epidemic, the answer is no. The number of people leaving California for another state outstripped the number moving in from another state during the year ending on July 1, 2009. California lost a net total of 144,000 people during that period — more than any other state, according to census estimates. But state officials are reluctant to write California’s obituary just yet.

“We have faced this kind of economic downturn in the past, and we will likely face one again in the future,” says New America Foundation senior fellow Gregory Rodriguez. “ What’s important, what makes us confident in our recovery, is that we pulled through and came out stronger. I have no doubt in my mind we will do that again.”

