

# ‘You’re laying me off, aren’t you?’

5 young locals describe being let go and what their lives have been like since

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Ever since he was a teenager, Rochester resident Kevin Stewart has dedicated himself to turning his hobby of producing music into a career.

The 26-year-old, who dreams of working with stars like Jay-Z, Kanye West and Lil Wayne, has produced tracks that have been played on WDKX. And two years ago Stewart caught what he thought was his big break when he found himself living in New Jersey and working with DJ Kay Gee from legendary rap group Naughty by Nature.

But last November things derailed. Stewart lost his day job, becoming one of 9,500 employees laid off by DHL Express after the shipping company announced it would discontinue overnight-delivery services in the United States.

“The only thing I can do now is look for jobs,” says Stewart, sitting at a table at Spot Coffee in the East End on one of his many free days.

Stewart always has had a laid-back personality, but these days he sounds detached.

His dream of making a living as a record producer has turned into the reality of becoming one of the nation’s more than 11 million unemployed (more than 30,000 of whom live in Rochester), according to figures released in December by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in Washington, D.C.

Stewart represents a generation of young adults who have never faced such trying economic times. He sums up his struggle in three simple words: “It’s hard, man.” And his eyes convey the sad realization that things may get worse before they get better.

Currently, Stewart’s recording equipment sits unused in his attic. He spends his time filling out employment applications and going to interviews, hoping he’ll be able to find a job just to pay the rent.

On the following pages you’ll find Stewart’s story and the stories of four other people who recently were laid off. In their own words, they talk about the day their lives changed and about the struggle to hold on to hope.

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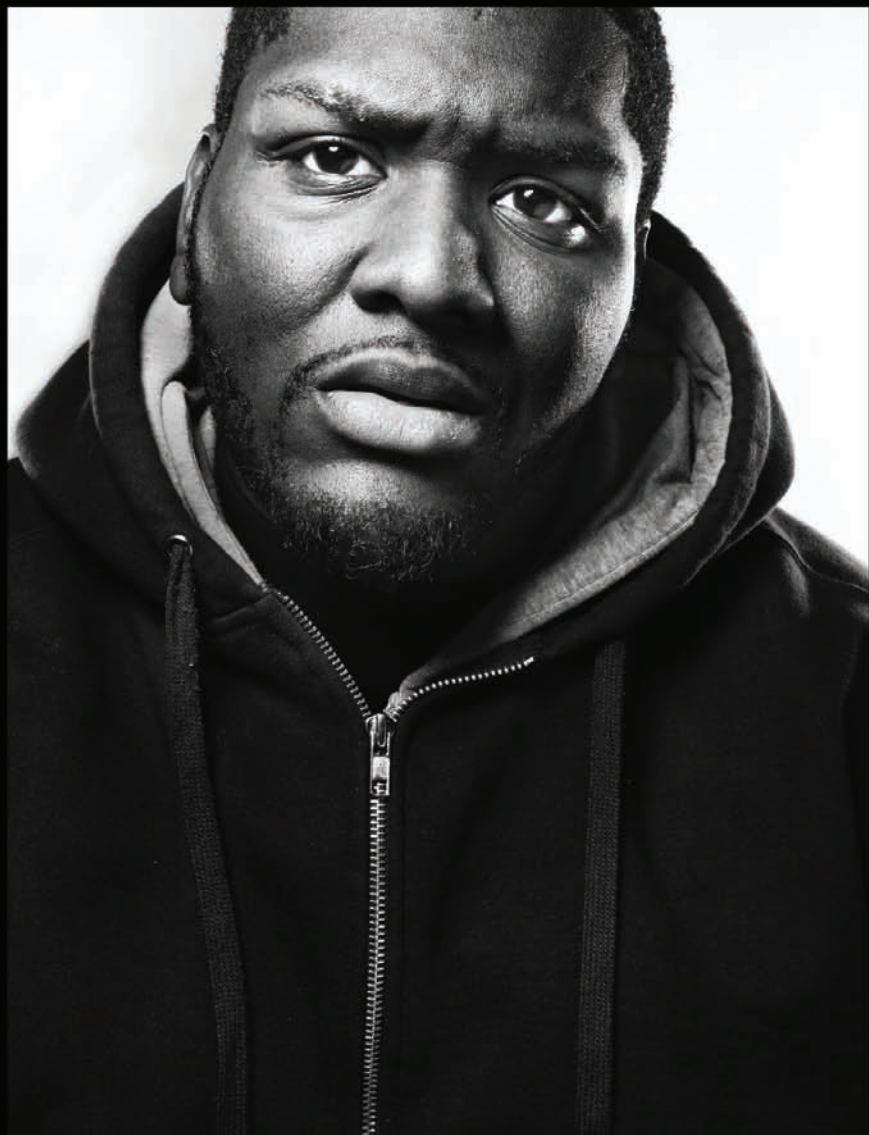
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**NAME:** Kevin Stewart **AGE:** 26  
**RESIDENCE:** Rochester  
**FORMER OCCUPATION:** DHL driver  
**LAI D OFF:** November 2008

“It was a Monday morning and (my boss) just brought me in the office, and his words were, ‘It’s about that time.’ ”

# Kevin Stewart,

## 26

I was working at DHL for about a year. I started right before Thanksgiving (2007), so they were going through the Christmas rush and it was crazy. They were just giving away hours. For a month straight I was working 6 in the morning to 9 at night, six days a week.

In October last year, it started to slow down and look kind of funny, like ‘What the hell is going on around here?’

They started shutting down different parts of service each week. Then there would be no ground packages and then no Super Express. Then there would be no regular express, until you’re just delivering whatever you can deliver when you can do it.

The only way I knew anything was up with DHL was on the news. A report said “DHL lays off 9,000 people in Ohio.” But no one knew who was going to be next. I didn’t hear anything from people in the building, but apparently we were next. Well, I was next.

They didn’t tell me the news until I got back from off the road. It was a Monday morning and (my boss) just brought me in the office, and his words were, “It’s about that time.” I already knew it was coming, but I was hoping to get at least a good two or three more weeks out of it. I didn’t think it was gonna be that day.

After they let me go, I tried to look for another job, but then I looked on the news again and they’re saying unemployment’s at an all-time high right now. Everybody’s looking for a job, and no one’s hiring. It’s just *that* hard to find something.

Right now I’m on unemployment, and that’s not working out as it’s supposed to. I play drums at a church and I’m on the payroll there. I wasn’t claiming that on my unemployment, though. It’s only, like, \$60 every week. So (the people at unemployment) are saying since I didn’t claim that for five weeks, they’re taking five weeks worth of money out of my benefits. They took one whole check, and they’re still taking money now.

There’s no way to get in contact with a human person when you’re trying to call the unemployment office. You’re just stuck trying to figure out what’s going on with your money.

It’s crazy. I’ve got a daughter. I’ve got rent due. I’ve got RG&E due. I’ve got my cell phone payment due.

I produce music, and I’ve got some equipment that needs to be fixed, but right now I can’t afford to do that, so I’m on hiatus. Nothing’s happening because I don’t have the money to keep my equipment up.

I have family and friends I could go to, but I’d rather not do that. I’ve always just done things on my own. That’s how I’ve been my whole life.

I’m waiting to see what this new stimulus package is going to be. They say it’s supposed to be big. I’m waiting to see what they think is ‘big.’

You know, I voted for Obama, and I hope he lives up to the hype. He’s definitely got a big task ahead of him. ♦

# Danielle Finucane,

## 26

It was January 2 at 4:50 p.m. when they called me into the office and changed my life.

We recently had a new boss come in for business management. She got the call from corporate saying budget cuts are coming. Basically, half of the country was laying off their

front-end people — all of their assistants.

I was finishing my day, got everything done for the week and was preparing for next week. They said, “We need to see you in the office.” I went in, shut the door and sat down. I immediately knew something was going on.

(My boss) was just like, “We got a call from corporate today.” I was like, “You’re laying me off, aren’t you?” She said yes.

I was like, “There’s nowhere else in this building, with as many departments as I’ve worked with, that you couldn’t find me a spot to go?” And they said no.

I was in shock. You have everything laid out in the way you organized it and have to give it to somebody else for them to finish, but they don’t give you much time to go through things and get them organized. At that point you’re just so shaken up, and I had 10 minutes to get out of there.

I’d been with the company for a little more than a year, and I took a lot of pride in my work. I was devastated. I went from always having a job since I was 12 years old to this. I’ve left jobs before, but I’ve never been laid off.

Since August I’ve had a part-time job at Spin Café, two days a week. It was just supposed to help me through Christmas and maybe (earn) some vacation money. Now it’s the only employment I have.

I’d never filed for unemployment before, but with a car payment, student loans and rent, you have to just suck it up and deal with it.

I try to work as many hours as I can, but unfortunately with unemployment, every day that you work a part-time job is money that they don’t give you. For my benefit it would be easier for me not to work more than two, three days.

I’ve been networking. I’ve been job-hunting. I’ve sent out about 50 resumes. I’m being as proactive as possible about this. I have experience in a lot of fields. I’m smart, and I know what I’m doing. It’s just trying to get employers to see that in your resume and give you a call. That’s the hardest thing about this.

What keeps me sane is that I have every day planned out. I get up in the morning, go on the computer and send out 10 more resumes for job openings. I keep myself busy by cleaning around the house or if I have a night shift at the coffeehouse. Trying to keep my mind busy is the best thing.

I get the same thing from everybody — “Keep your head up. You’re a smart girl. Somebody’s going to call you.”

I’ve been hearing that a lot. I just hope it comes true. ♦



**NAME:** Danielle Finucane **AGE:** 26

**RESIDENCE:** Rochester

**FORMER OCCUPATION:** Receptionist/sales assistant  
for a local television station

**LAI D OFF:** January 2009

“You have everything laid out in the way you organized it and have to give it to somebody else for them to finish, but they don’t give you much time to go through things.”

# Joshua Roberts,

# 31

The economy took a real hit in the automotive market. A lot of places closed. A lot of new car dealerships were struggling. We kind of knew in September that high-line automotive sales were starting to go down.

You could see it coming. The auctions that usually sell 60 to 70 percent of the vehicles we had were down to 15 to 30 percent. Certain Web sites that you would specifically use to sell exotic cars, you could see they were just loaded with ads and people trying to get rid of whatever they had.

I had been working at the dealership for three years. (My bosses) came to me and a couple other guys and said, "We're downsizing, and we can't afford to keep you on right now." They're good friends of mine, so they came to me before stuff hit the fan.

I knew the months ahead were gonna be tough. They gave us enough heads-up where you could try to find employment right away. You jump on search engines like Monster and Career Builder, but there wasn't a lot out there. I didn't go to college, and there's a lot jobs out there where you need a degree.

Right now, I'm still looking for work. I've kind of changed gears a little bit. I'm pretty much open to whatever. Maybe something part time back in the auto sales industry, but for now I'd like something a bit more stable. And for a while there, things were good. I was doing four or five cars a week and bringing home \$1,500, two grand a week. But when the economy started going down, people started watching their money more.

I've been in automotive for 15 years, but now I'm going through the process of trying to get into the Wegmans warehouse, which is a totally different thing.

In the past few months I've really seen the job market get low. Even executives are jumping into whatever they can get. There was a guy on one of those morning shows the other day. He was some kind of marketing director, and he's working at Starbucks now. Those are the kind of swings people are taking just to get back into the working world.

I have unemployment, but it's tough getting by. I've gotten myself down to where I don't have a lot of bills. I just have a car payment, my cell phone and normal home bills.

You cut back on the cable. You cut back on the house phone and stuff like that. You learn to really budget yourself with what you have.

People can't expect Obama to change the country overnight. It's gonna take a lot from everyone. We have to work together as a country. And it's starting to creep back up slowly but surely. You can see it a little here and there. But it's gonna take a lot more to build it back up than it did to tear it down. ♦

"For a while there, things were good. I was (selling) four or five cars a week and bringing home \$1,500, two grand a week."

**NAME:** Joshua Roberts **AGE:** 31

**RESIDENCE:** Rochester

**FORMER OCCUPATION:** High-end auto sales

**LAI D OFF:** November 2008



# Erin McDermott,

**26** It was the Monday before Thanksgiving. I did kind of see it coming because my position was kind of risky to begin with. There wasn't a position when I started there — they created one for me. Ever since the beginning it was always a struggle to try to find something for me to do until the big projects were going to come along.

Before this ... I lived in Michigan, and then I came back to Rochester and I started this job. And then they sent me to Germany ... (so) when I came back I thought, 'If I'm going to stay here for a while, I want to make a home.' My boss told me in May I didn't have anything to worry about. I asked him when I came back from Germany if I should get a six-month lease or a 12-month lease. And he said to go for the 12-month lease.

The president (of the company) and my boss came out and called the first person into the office. Five minutes later they're shaking his hand and telling him "Good luck." I had a feeling I was next.

I was coming down the hallway, and my boss was coming in the opposite direction, and we met in the middle and he said, "Do you have a moment?" I go in the office and the president shakes my hand. And they both just looked terrible. My boss was all puffy and red, and he looked like he was going to cry the whole time. But I was laughing through the whole thing because I saw it coming and there was nothing anyone could do.

Then I went home and cracked open a bottle of wine. The whole day I was really just delirious. Luckily, I had already bought all the stuff for Thanksgiving, so we were still able to have Thanksgiving.

I think just last week it set in. But I really do have the expectation that this is going to lead somewhere better. I was right there that day looking online for jobs. The next day I plastered my resume up all over the job sites and contacted my school and just reached out to my network, and they all tried to look into what they could. But they're all going through the same thing.

I was actually contacted by a recruiter the day after I got laid off. It built my confidence up, but then it never went anywhere. But it still got me through the first week.

I was working crazy hours, and the weekends were pretty much just for catching up on sleep and doing laundry. I never had any time to do any of the things I wanted to do. I've been reading, and I've been painting. I started this painting two years ago, and I never made any progress at it because I never had any time.

I've actually been taking this opportunity to kind of reevaluate what I want to do and try to look at my skills. I was in really stressful meetings where people from different companies were yelling at each other and going head-to-head. And I would calm them down so it got to a point where we could come to a consensus. And with engineers, communication isn't really their strong point. So I feel like that's a strong point for me and something I could focus on some more, even if it's not in engineering. Becoming a consultant for engineers is definitely something I'm looking in to.

I have this feeling that something better is going to come along. This is the third time this has happened to me, and each time, something bigger and better has come along, and it's only the result of getting laid off. If I hadn't been laid off at this point or that point, then I couldn't have gotten the next job. I'm just trying to think that the same thing is happening now. ♦



**NAME:** Erin McDermott **AGE:** 26  
**RESIDENCE:** Fairport  
**PREVIOUS OCCUPATION:** Optical engineer  
at a local manufacturing firm  
**LAI D OFF:** November 2008

"I have this feeling that something better is going to come along. This is the third time this has happened to me, and each time, something bigger and better has come along ..."

# Elliot Vos,

## 22

I found out my dad had been laid off from a ... company in Jamestown. Then my mind starts wandering and thinking, 'What if I get let go, too? What am I going to do?'

I was the very first person to go the next day.

I walk in at 8 a.m., set my stuff down, turn my computer on, and then the director came by right after that. I had already been playing it through my mind a million times hoping it wasn't going to be true.

They pretty much just escorted me right out. I had to get my lunch out of the fridge, so I did manage to say goodbye to a couple people. They packaged all my stuff for me and sent it to me through a courier.

I sat in the parking lot just to calm down for a little while, and ... I didn't go straight home. I talked to my old academic adviser (at Rochester Institute of Technology), and right away she was like, "Well, get me your resume, and I'll get it out to some people."

It was kind of a weird situation because we knew that layoffs were coming. It was around Thanksgiving — not a really nice time to be hearing about stuff like that. A lot of my co-workers were more nervous than I was. And I guess that kind of got me a little worried, but I didn't really think about it because I'm a new graduate, and I can always find work if I need to. I was pretty optimistic about the whole thing.

I really did enjoy my job, but it is nice to have some time off. But I'd rather have something to do. So I still get up early and try to do stuff. It's hard to get motivated to do the job search, even. I don't really enjoy the cover letters and stuff like that. I at least need to get up and do something, even if I'm just screwing around on the Internet or tinkering around with doing some of my own software development. Just to have a project to work on to keep my mind busy.

The holiday season kind of changed everything, too. And it was actually kind of nice to be unemployed during the holidays because I could do a lot more.

My dad calls me every other day because, well, he doesn't have much to do either. He keeps me motivated to keep at stuff. He's looking at maybe a career change. He's already in his 50s, so how much can he re-learn at this point? It was kind of weird at Christmas going into it knowing it might be our last Christmas in Jamestown, because he has far fewer prospects there and might have to move.

I really love Rochester, and I want to stay here. I have a good community of friends, I love my church, and so I really want to stay in Rochester. But there are some opportunities in some of the bigger cities. There are opportunities in Rochester — it's just getting yourself out there.

It's hard to see why this is going on, but I'm sure God has a reason.♦

"I still get up early and try to do stuff. ... even if I'm just ... tinkering around with doing some of my own software development. Just to have a project to work on to keep my mind busy."

**NAME:** Elliot Vos **AGE:** 22

**FORMER OCCUPATION:** Software engineer at PAETEC

**RESIDENCE:** Rochester

**LAI D OFF:** November 2008

