



Health-care industry drives local job market

Retail, temporary workers needed

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The health-care industry has been doing its best for months to boost the Springfield area's job prospects.

But for what might be the first time in months, health care isn't the only jobs game in town.

"Health care is the big driver right now," said Erich Bloxdorf, executive vice president of the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce.

Employers such as Springfield Clinic, St. John's Hospital and Memorial Health System are hiring for both clinical positions — nurses, physical therapists and the like — and other jobs, including clerical workers in support services.

However, added Sarah Wolin, the chamber's director of communications. "We've been hearing that temporary employment is going up, and that's the trend nationally.

"Retail is going up, and health care is definitely charging forward," she said. "There are some tremendous employment opportunities there.

"It's a big sign there's a turnaround coming," she said.

Entry-level jobs go fast

St. John's Hospital lists more than 100 jobs in 62 different job categories on its website.

"The entry-level jobs that don't require an education or training go pretty fast," said Tracie Sayre, the hospital's employment manager. "Registered nursing positions, physical therapists and pharmacists take a little longer to fill because not just anyone can qualify for them."

Sayre said St. John's still recruits "for lots of different jobs, both clinical and non-clinical," but that she has noticed more applicants for those jobs in recent months.

"And it feels like the RN positions have slowed down," she said. "People are staying put and not moving around in this economy."

At Springfield Clinic, building expansion has meant job growth.

"We continue to expand, which is a wonderful thing," said Leigh Ann Harrison, director of human resources for the clinic.

"We've hired a dozen physicians, in different specialties, over the past year," she said. "The patient base continues to grow."

But Springfield Clinic is hiring for all positions, from RNs to receptionists to information technology jobs.

"We're fortunate that the majority of our jobs are 8 to 5, Monday through Friday," she said.

"It's a wonderful field to be in, and it's a wonderful field in which to be in human resources," she said.

Hospital like 'small city'

Memorial Health System, which has six affiliates, including Memorial Medical Center, currently has 2,331 job listings on its website.

"Those cover a wide range of positions throughout the system," said Jennie Collings, director for workforce planning and development for Memorial Health System.

Those jobs include physician assistant and certified nursing assistant, as well as environmental services, housekeeping and laundry positions.

"We're sort of like a small city here," she said. "So you'll find jobs you might not expect to find at a hospital, like in information technology," she said.

Memorial added jobs when a new unit opened last fall and also has had some expansion in its operating rooms, she said.

"Some of the jobs are new positions," she said. "We've had roughly the same number of job openings, although from Oct. 1 I've seen an increase in the number of jobs we're hiring for, but not a huge change."

Not hopeless

Healthcare is not the only industry hiring, said Mary Beth Ray, director of career development services at Lincoln Land Community College.

Ray said accounting, office and administrative support and retail continue to hire. There also are certain specialties, such as

computer-aided drafting of architectural and other designs, that actually have a shortage of applicants.

“People are surprised at the number of jobs that are out there. There’s just so much competition for each one,” said Ray.

“It’s not hopeless, but people really have to have their game together,” she said.

The local branch of TruGreen — one of the nation’s largest lawn and landscaping companies — is trying a job fair this year to fill jobs for sales and lawn-care specialists, said Carrie Roth, general manager of the Springfield office.

“This is something different we’re trying. We’re trying to capture a different audience,” said Roth.

Sessions are scheduled for 10 a.m., 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. Thursday at the Hilton Garden Inn on Dirksen Parkway.

Roth said the company anticipates the need for additional staff as the market continues to rebound.

“This is the first time we’ve had to hire this year, and we wanted to reach as many people as possible,” said Roth.

Temp work on rise

Jim Britton, owner of Express Personnel Services in Springfield and Bloomington, says hiring of temporary workers — long considered a harbinger of future employment — has been increasing since November.

But he says companies have been ultra-cautious about turning those temporary spots into permanent jobs. Some economists say businesses are reluctant to hire permanent employees because of doubts about the recovery’s staying power.

“Beginning in November 2009, things started to turn,” he said. “That’s been across the country for Express, but it has been pretty consistent everywhere.”

He said the biggest fall-off was in April 2009. The last full week of December was the local staffing agency’s best week of the year, he said.

“That’s unheard of,” Britton said. “It usually slows down around then.”

Express Personnel Services as a company is about 35 percent ahead of last year. Britton said that’s equally true for the Springfield market.

“Typically, in past recessions, our industry is a three- to six-month leading indicator of what’s to come,” he said. “Businesses trim head count and are kind of lean. Then, when things get better, they need extra hands quickly.”

Even manufacturing

Manufacturing has long been moribund in Springfield, and another 120 manufacturing jobs will be lost when Honeywell Hobbs closes its local plant by the end of the year.

But some manufacturing hiring is occurring.

Simplex Inc., which manufactures power distribution and control systems, has been advertising for electrical engineers and an AutoCAD technician.

Mel-O-Cream Donuts International was present at the career fair, this time looking to fill a management position.

“We’re doing some hiring, and we did some last year,” said Dave Ryan, human resources and compliance officer with Mel-O-Cream. He said production workers are among those hires.

“We’re very fortunate that our business is growing right now, and it has been,” he said. “There’s an old axiom that the bakery business always does well in bad times.”

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Job fair a success

About 400 students and non-students attended the 12th annual Collegiate Career Fair last week on the campus of the University of Illinois Springfield. The fair gave them the opportunity to talk with nearly 100 prospective employers.

Based on registrations, 72 of those attending were not students of the host colleges — UIS, Lincoln Land Community College, Robert Morris University and Benedictine University at Springfield.

“For us to reach 100 employers this year was an accomplishment,” said Rachel Hasenyager of the UIS Career Development Center. “There are a lot of industries that used to come out — like the city of Springfield, other government entities — that aren’t here.”

However, she said, the companies that were at the fair “are hiring hundreds of people.”

“There are a lot more jobs out there over a year ago,” Hasenyager said.

Firms represented at the fair ranged from not-for-profit organizations such as Girl Scouts of Central Illinois to retailers like County Market to accounting and financial firms such as Crowe Horwath. Banks, manufacturers, government agencies, temporary employment agencies and education institutions also were represented.

“They’re offering lots of jobs, both full- and part-time, and internships, too,” she said.

The Girl Scouts, for example, were seeking part-time employees for summer camps.

“The financial industry is now very big in its hiring,” Hasenyager said. “Both Prudential and Northwestern Mutual posted jobs on campus.”

She said many job seekers make connections at the career fair, then follow up two to three weeks later.

The U.S. Census Bureau, however, was interviewing on the spot.

It expects to hire 1,500 to 2,000 people across 20 central Illinois counties at between \$10 and \$13 an hour to go door-to-door for the census. Those jobs will last about three months.

Nationally, Hasenyager said, for every six jobseekers, there is one job.

“That holds true here, too,” she said.

What’s it pay?

Hourly wages at entry level and experienced for selected job categories in the Springfield area

All occupations: \$8.99; \$25.57

Management: \$22.20; \$45.05

Sales: \$7.82; \$38.86

Legal occupations: \$14.88; \$38.36

Healthcare and technical: \$14.76; \$37.61

Business and financial operations: \$16.80; \$32.66

Construction: \$14.23; \$29.19

Community and social services: \$11.62; \$27.31

Installation, maintenance and repairs: \$11.92; \$26.52

Education, training and library occupations: \$10.10; \$25.60

Production and manufacturing: \$9.07; \$19.35

Transportation and materials moving: \$8.56; \$18.56

Office and administrative support: \$9.39; \$18.26

Healthcare support: \$9.81; \$17.14

Food preparation and related occupations: \$7.42; \$10.25

Who’s hardest hit?

Characteristics of laid-off workers in Illinois 2009.

Industry: Manufacturing, 34 percent; construction and mining, 18 percent; professional and business services (includes temporary workers), 21 percent; transportation/warehouse/utilities, 8 percent; tourism and retail, 5 percent each.

Education level: 9-12 years, 28 percent; 13-16 years, 15 percent; 17 years or more, 2 percent.

Age: Younger than 30, 21 percent; 30-44, 36 percent; 45-54, 26 percent; 55 and older, 17 percent.

Gender: Men, 67 percent; women, 33 percent.

Race: White, 67 percent; black, 16 percent; Hispanic, 13 percent; Asian-Pacific Islander, 3 percent.

Unemployment

December unemployment rates compared to December 2008

Springfield: 8.4; 6.2

Illinois: 11; 7.2

U.S: 10; 7.4

Source: Illinois Department of Employment Security

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