

Fields That Buck Job Trends

Philadelphia Business Journal

By Athena Merritt, February 20th, 2009

Pennsylvania bled more than 76,000 jobs last year, but opportunities for employment still exist in the region for workers in certain industries and who know where to look.

The federal government alone hired 136,791 workers nationwide last year, a number it expects to match or exceed this year. As of last week, 1,626 federal job openings existed across the state, including 456 in Philadelphia.

When the nation faces challenges, such as the economic downturn or a war, the government has historically grown to meet new needs, said John Palguta, vice president for policy for Partnership for Public Service, a nonprofit advocate of government employment and work force quality.

With the federal government's continued loss of workers — who retire, quit or are terminated — and the rollout of a national recovery plan, that need isn't expected to diminish anytime soon, Palguta said.

"They need to be able to hire people at all levels, entry level, midcareer and, on occasion, very seasoned folks for some of their executive jobs. So there are good opportunities," he said.

The Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board, which released a list of the 30 hot jobs in the region last month, reported job demand in four distinct categories: health care/education, technology, green jobs and support occupations.

The good news is that people are hiring, Palguta said. The bad news is there is going to be a lot of competition. Landing most of the jobs also typically requires some training or education, PWIB CEO Sallie Glickman said.

"Entry level jobs just haven't been in demand and that's been a challenge I think for some time that we don't have those opportunities in our markets," Glickman said.

In both the private and public sectors nursing demand continues to exceed supply. In the next eight years, there are expected to be 3,932 open positions in Philadelphia and 16,073 in the region for registered nurses. Teachers will also be in top demand in the area, Meg Shope Koppel, director of research at PWIB, said.

"We have a lot of teachers in the public system in Philadelphia and the region who are in their 60s, so you are seeing a lot of people who have held those jobs a long time getting near the end of their career," Shope Koppel said.

Last month, the top five job postings on Careerbuilder.com for the region were health care/health service, followed by insurance, sales/marketing, banking/financial services and pharmaceutical. About 5,000 health-care jobs were posted in both December and January and between 1,500 and 2,000 in each month for each of the other industries.

McGrath Systems, a staffing and recruiting firm in Blue Bell, anticipates 200 to 250 positions will be created within the first and second quarter of this year in health care, defense and energy markets in the Delaware Valley.

"There is significant demand in this region today for anybody that is related to fossil fuels and renewable energy and nuclear energy, anybody that has that type of experience is highly sought-after today," said Michael Wiley, who founded the firm in 2005.

With \$71 billion for clean-energy programs included in the national recovery package signed by President Obama Tuesday, that demand is expected to grow.

"Some of these are really low threshold," Glickman said of the opportunities that exist in the emerging industry. "The job of energy auditor is a good entry-level place. This is an emerging green job and it requires a high school diploma and a certification that requires strong math skills."

Alternative fuel technologies also mean more jobs for auto technicians in the future, who are also in demand because of the current economic downturn, said Daniel Reed, an assistant professor in the Community College of Philadelphia's transportation technologies management department.

"In the current state of the economy while we hear every day about a dealership closing, fortunately for those in the industry that repair vehicles, it means people are keeping their vehicles longer and repairing them," Reed said.

With the current slowdown in the economy, now is a good time to consider what jobs will be in demand — both now and in the future, Koppel said.

"We are trying to encourage people to see education as an investment," Koppel said. "It's the same as investing money."