

WORKPLACE MATTERS

Joblessness still high, but economy looking better

Despite the unemployment rate hovering around 11 percent in Lane County, signs of an economic turnaround seem to be in sight for local businesses.



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Jerry Stiltner, business manager of Personnel Source said, "I've seen more activity in recent months than I've seen in the last couple of years." Increased hiring at temporary employment agencies is often an early indicator of an economic turnaround because temporary jobs are usually the first to bounce back

as recession moves into recovery, according to labor market analysts.

Between 2008 and 2010, Lane County shed approximately 17,700 jobs. The latest report from the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis forecasts an uptick in job growth in the first quarter of 2011 and predicts that the recovery will shift into a higher gear by the end of 2011.

"Those who come out and see the sky isn't falling are going to be the big winners," said Matt Parsons with Commonwealth Financial Network in Cottage Grove. Parsons said he has seen a significant drop in IRA liquidation calls and more of his clients are buying cars and taking trips, which indicates more confidence in the economic outlook.

Also in the financial sector, Rosie Pryor, vice president of marketing and strategic planning at Oregon Community Credit Union, reports that loan originations at her organization doubled between 2009 and 2010.

Diane Wiley, director of the Riverfront Research Park, said one of her barometers for how well the park's research and technology companies are doing is how full the parking lot is. "More people have reported difficulty finding parking, which is a good thing," she said.

Linda Dagg, director of Enterprise Holdings, said the call center in downtown Eugene has remained strong. "We're in good enough shape to train employees during our down time, rather than lay people off," she said. She also anticipates increased staffing at the center and more employees working from home.

Even manufacturing, one of the hardest hit sectors in the local economy, is seeing some upswing. Lane Workforce Partnership recently polled 33 local manufacturers and found that 57 percent are anticipating increased sales, 47 percent are bringing employees back up to full-time status, and 50 percent intend to hire in the next six months.

The local construction industry lost 2,400 jobs during the recession and is still struggling. Gary Wildish of Chambers Construction sees similarities to the '80s recession, when highly skilled construction workers left Oregon to work elsewhere. "The industry is still in the doldrums," he said. We are rehiring some laid-off employees, but many of the top-notch people have left the area."

Although the pace of recovery has been slower than hoped for, there is evidence of a positive trend in the local economy. In a recent survey, the Oregon Employment Department found that a third of Oregon employers expect to hire in the next six months. As expected, the majority of these jobs will be replacement jobs for those lost during the recession. However, if all goes as predicted, significant new job creation will start to appear during late 2014, according to regional economist Brian Rooney.

If you have questions about training your work force, contact Robin Onaclea Scott, business service coordinator at Lane Workforce Partnership, at robino@laneworkforce.org or 541-682-7224.