

Print Page



Last modified Saturday, November 1, 2008 7:06 PM PDT



Christian Timpani drops off his time card Friday afternoon after his first week of work to administrative assistant Pat Carrier at Tri Staff Group, an employment agency with an office in San Marcos. Christian said he got a job through the agency and started last Monday, "the day my employment benefits ran out." (Photo by Bill Wechter - Staff Photographer)

EMPLOYMENT: Even in tough economy, some are hiring

By CHRIS BAGLEY - Staff Writer

Unemployment in San Diego County has grown steadily for a year, but its 6.4 percent rate for September says little about North County companies that have been hiring in recent weeks ---- or the ones that haven't been.

One clear trend in the jobs market is that skilled and experienced workers are being laid off in smaller numbers, can more easily find new jobs, and can sometimes hold out for good jobs, employment agents said.

But for security guards, health care professionals, accountants, software engineers and some other professions, jobs are available, according to job boards and interviews with employment agents.

State data and interviews with employment agents indicate that companies are looking for thousands of workers but from July through September, the state Employment Development Department's job bank showed about seven candidates for every posting for finance-related jobs and three applicants for every posting of tourism-related jobs.

That's less true for unskilled workers, said Jim Hanna, who owns Advanced Employment Staffing Services in San Marcos. Several employers and agents recall the tight job market of 2004 and 2005, when an employer sometimes either had to accept a marginally qualified applicant or pay top dollar to attract a better one from a different company

"In these days, you have to work 125 percent harder than you did" to get a job in some fields, said Gary van Eik, whose TriStaff Group, an employment agency, has employment offices in San Diego, San Marcos and Temecula.

On the other hand, van Eik said he recently placed an estimator from the tattered home-building industry by finding a similar job in commercial construction. Van Eik said the candidate had extensive experience with a key software program that the job required, though industry data show that commercial construction, on the whole, is slowing.

Accountants and people with experience in software and information technology are in generally high demand, he said.

Industries with perennially high turnover continue to hire, if perhaps at a slower pace.

SOS Security, a New Jersey-based contractor to commercial landlords, is continuing to hire at locations in San Diego County and elsewhere, representatives said.

Valley View Casino is advertising jobs for a nonsmoking wing of its casino, which it said it expects to open in December. The casino is hiring about 75 people to fill floor and restaurant positions in addition to 60 or 70 positions in maintenance, accounting, dealing and restaurants that are either new or are open as a result of ongoing expansion, a Valley View spokesperson said.

One factor in the higher joblessness recently is the election looming next week, van Eik said. Some companies have delayed hiring because they're waiting to see whether the new president and Congress are friendly to business.

Most economists in the region say the job situation will probably get worse before it gets better.

Economist Chris Thornberg said it's already worse than the 6.4 percent rate that the state Employment Development Department calculated for San Diego County in September. Thornberg is a partner at Los Angeles-based Beacon Economics, a private consulting firm.

He said the agency's sampling method doesn't account for new companies that sprout up during economic booms, or those that disappear when the economy goes bad.

The state revises its data at the beginning of every year, and Thornberg said he expects the revision next year will show September's unemployment to have been closer to 7 percent.

Still, he said, rising unemployment hardly means that laid-off workers can't get new jobs. The big problem is that the job-hunting process takes longer, particularly for unskilled workers.

That's a particular problem for unskilled workers because they're usually less able to stretch their savings until the next job starts.

That's is a bigger problem than it was during the last economic downturn, in 2001, or the last recession, in the early 1990s, economists said.

One company hiring mostly skilled workers is the owner of Ashford University. Sabre Springs-based Bridgepoint Education bought the university in late 2005 when it had just a few hundred students in Clinton, Iowa. The university now has 20,000 online students and employs 1,300 people at its headquarters in the Sabre Springs neighborhood of northern San Diego. It plans to hire another an additional 1,500 by early 2010, spokeswoman Diane Salucci said.

"We're just bursting at the seams," Salucci said.

Contact staff writer Chris Bagley at (760) 740-5444 or cbagley@nctimes.com. Bagley blogs about local economic trends at www.nctimes.com/blogs/minding_your_business.

By the numbers

Employers advertised the following numbers of openings in San Diego County for each of the following jobs on the California Employment Development Department's job board during the July-September period.

Security guards 2,493

Registered nurses 1,818

Computer systems analysts 1,209

Software engineers, systems software 1,206

Home health aides 1,150

Computer software engineers, applications 873

Retail salespersons 731

Computer support specialists 679

Mechanical engineers 645

Industrial engineers 639

Electricians 592

Retail managers 591

Electrical engineers 589

Computer hardware engineers 558

Administrative assistants 486

Source: California EDD