

## **Job Market Has Signs of Life.**

**Pensacola area sees an uptick in jobs, but it's too soon to call it a recovery**

**Pensacola, FL** – March 28, 2010 - After a long, cold winter of record unemployment, a spring thaw may be emerging in the Pensacola area job market.

But whether it's just a temporary break, or the start of a long-term warming trend remains to be seen.

According to CareerBuilder's 2010 Job Forecast, the number of employers planning to add headcount to their payrolls increased to 20 percent in 2010, up from 14 percent in 2009. Local temporary staffing companies and job placement agencies say the trends in the Pensacola Bay Area are encouraging.

"Since the beginning of the year, I'm glad to say, we've seen an uptick in jobs coming through here," Denise McLeod, chief operating officer of Pensacola-based Landrum Staffing, said. "Particularly when compared to 12 months ago we're seeing a significant change. But we're still not where we were two years ago."

Linn Farris, president of Keegan Staffing, is seeing the jobs market rise in the last two or three months, especially in clerical jobs and certain skilled workers.

But what's more encouraging, she said, is that about 90 percent of her recent clients have gone from temporary to permanent hires.

Married and the father of two young children, Justin Scott, 25, is one of them.

A framing and heavy equipment operator, Scott was laid off last year as the recession hit local contractors hard.

"It was very difficult to find something steady," Scott said. "The temporary services would put me out on a few jobs here and there, but finding permanent work was pretty difficult."

But then Scott got lucky.

## In demand

Dawn Truax, branch manager of Workers Temporary Staffing, saw his resume online, called him and after a phone interview referred him to Pensacola contractor Greenhut Construction.

Scott was hired as a temporary worker at Greenhut's Navy Federal Credit Union work site at its Heritage Oaks campus in Beulah.

After six months proving himself on the job, Scott said he was hired as a full-time assistant supervisor.

"They (Greenhut) actually had a guy leaving to get a job with Navy Federal," Scott said. "So they hired me as their layout man. I'm kind of the 'go-to guy' for the main superintendent."

For Scott, a permanent job with major contractor "is a joy every day I go to work. It's a dream come true."

In the past couple of weeks Farris said she also has had a spate of calls from more than two dozen law offices needing secretaries and paralegals.

"We're also seeing a rise in the demand for skilled workers in medical doctors offices and in lawyers offices, which is kind of curious," she said.

## Recession cushion

Stories like Scott's are becoming more prevalent, Farris said.

Though uncertainty remains in the workplace as a whole, several sectors of the job market are holding steady as the economy struggles to recover from a severe and prolonged recession.

As it has in the past, jobs associated with military spending and construction are helping to ease unemployment numbers, and cushion the recession locally.

"We're still down in construction jobs when compared to last year, but the military bases along the Gulf Coast are booming," Truax said. "And since we specialized in the skilled trades, due to the work at military bases we're fine."

Truax said because of the construction boom at military bases, she is sending her clients farther afield from Pensacola.

"You have to go where the work is. And there's a lot of construction going on at Eglin and Hurlburt."

Truax said during the past couple of weeks she's seen a significant pick up in demand for local construction jobs for civilian projects.

Other sectors that seem to be weathering the storm, McLeod said, are health care and hospitality.

"We expect to see the job market in the health care sector expand even more," McLeod said.

Tom Owsley, a spokesman for Workforce Escarosa, a state-funded jobs placement agency, agrees with McLeod that demand for health care jobs remains strong.

"I'm also seeing some jobs in the transportation sector," he said. "But with the economy the way it is, things are still very tough in construction, manufacturing and production."

A huge pool of available, skilled talent is perhaps the main factor enticing employers to start hiring again. And employers are raising the bar on qualifications of potential workers.

"Employer criteria have gone through the roof," Farrior said. "They know the employee base is so high. I had a call this morning for a temp worker for a one-week job and the employer wanted someone with five years experience. I have never had that happen before."