

Bulletin Board: Future looks bright for blue-collar workers

by Maggie_Reed

It certainly helps - a college degree - but not all the hot jobs in 2007 will require one.

As might be expected, the job market favors those with a four-year college degrees, with just 1.8 percent of these workers currently unemployed.

What is surprising is that the unemployment rate for workers with high school diploma and those with some college or an associate's degree is also below the national average of 4.5 percent.

The unemployment rate for high school graduates was 4.3 percent in November, down from 4.8 percent in November 2005. Just 3.3 percent of those with some advanced education were idle in November.

"Some of the best job growth opportunities will be for those with an associate degree or some kind of vocational training. However, low unemployment in this category of workers could mean that employers will struggle to fill vacancies. As a result, we could see more companies try to lure workers with signing bonuses, better benefits and higher wages," said John A. Challenger, chief executive officer of global outplacement consultancy Challenger, Gray & Christmas Inc.

Sales, support staff in the legal sector, personal trainers and transportation workers in the trucking and rail industries are all occupations in demand due to increased business and high retirement. According to the 2007 job outlook released by Challenger, Gray & Christmas Inc. Many of these jobs pay more than \$100,000 per year.

Demand should remain high for workers in occupational categories unaffected by the current housing slowdown.

"The housing slowdown ultimately may be a non-issue when it comes to jobs. Even the jobs of construction workers may be safe as a healthy commercial construction market offsets weakness in residential building," Challenger said. "Furthermore, the housing market slowdown, while expected to continue into 2007, is not expected to be severe enough to bring down the entire economy."

IN DEMAND

One type of worker in particularly high demand is that of interpreter/translator, especially in hospitals where it becomes a matter of life and death.

"It used to be that companies could get by with a Spanish-speaking staff member. Today, you need people who can speak Korean, Chinese, Farsi and Polish, just to name a few of the hundreds of languages represented in America," Challenger said.

The transportation industry is another hotbed of growth. In particular, railroads are going the extra mile to secure workers.

Union Pacific, based in Omaha, Neb., has sent recruiters to Michigan in an attempt to attract workers left jobless by the declining auto industry.

For more information, visit www.challengergray.com.

TOP 10 BLUE-COLLAR JOBS

The future is indeed looking bright for blue-collar workers, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The following are the top 10 blue-collar jobs based on salary and expected growth in employment by 2014:

- Construction and building inspectors. Current pay: \$43,670 per year. Expected growth: 18 percent to 26 percent.

- Waste and wastewater treatment plant and system operators. Current pay: \$34,960 per year. Expected growth: 9 percent to 17 percent.

- Elevator installers and repairers. Current pay: \$28.23 per hour. Expected growth: 9 percent to 17 percent.

- Subway and streetcar operators. Current pay: \$23.70 per hour. Expected growth: 9 percent to 17 percent.

- Iron and metalworkers. Current pay: \$20.40 per hour. Expected growth: 9 percent to 17 percent.

- Electricians. Current pay: \$20.33 per hour. Expected growth: 9 percent to 17 percent.

- Brick masons, block masons and stonemasons. Current pay: \$20.07 per hour. Expected growth: 9 percent to 17 percent.

- Plumbers, pipe layers, pipe fitters and steamfitters. Current pay: \$19.85 per hour. Expected growth: 9 percent to 17 percent.

- Heating, air conditioning, refrigeration mechanics and installers. Current pay: \$17.43 per hour. Expected growth: 18 percent to 26 percent.

- Carpenters. Current pay: \$16.78 per hour. Expected growth: 9 percent to 17 percent.

For more information, visit www.bls.gov.

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