

HEATHER BOULGER | INSIDE THE JOB MARKET

'Tis the season to be thankful

- By Heather Boulger
- Nov 14, 2025



Despite the rise in online shopping opportunities, industry research indicates that 90 percent of U.S. retail sales still take place in brick-and-mortar locations, notes columnist Heather Boulger.
METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

The month of November serves as a seasonal reminder to appreciate the good in our lives and extend gratitude to those around us.

People tend to be more pleasant this time of year, smiles are more abundant, and there's often a noticeable boost in morale in our workplace. Gratitude deserves a permanent place in our lives. One of my goals for this hectic time of year is to take time each day to count my blessings, identify what I am thankful for and to pay it forward.

Remember our veterans: Pay it forward this November by thanking a veteran.

"Thank you for your service" is what I typically say when I see a person wearing a veteran's hat to thank them for their contributions to our country. My dad, brother and many of my relatives are veterans and we know the dedication and pride that they have for serving. We can celebrate our blessings and freedoms because of their sacrifices.

Veterans comprise 5.5 percent of the Berkshire population compared to only 4.0 percent of Massachusetts. The labor force participation rate for veterans in the Berkshires is 72 percent, and their unemployment rate is 9.8 percent. Twenty-eight percent of local veterans have a disability. There are 1,424 veteran-owned firms in the Berkshires as well

The MassHire Berkshire Career Center provides priority of service to veterans, and can help access employment and training opportunities. Massachusetts employers that hire a veteran may be eligible for a federal tax credit. Let's show our veterans that we appreciate their sacrifices each and every day.

The Berkshire County unemployment rate is 4.1 percent, which shows 65,582 people in the labor force, with 62,866 employed. It is our goal at MassHire to help the remaining 2,716 unemployed county residents and those looking for career changes to connect them to the myriad workforce programs to find their perfect employment opportunity here in the Berkshires.

This week, there were 3,200 job postings in the Berkshires on the JobQuest website, and hundreds more posted on other venues. For an overview of local workforce services and employment opportunities, visit MassHireBerkshire.com.

Holly, Jolly Season: According to the National Retail Federation (NRF)'s seasonal forecast, it's shaping up to be a jolly season with holiday spending expected to grow by 4 percent. According to the NRF, 91 percent of consumers plan to celebrate the winter holidays, and are budgeting an average of \$890 for gifts and seasonal items.

Families with children plan to spend \$33 more on average on gifts, and 42 percent of holiday shoppers plan to browse and buy items before November. What made the wish list this year? Gift cards, clothing, books/media, electronics and personal care items. The top shopping destinations include online, grocery venues, department stores, discount stores and small businesses.

The NRF expects retailers will hire between 265,000 and 365,000 seasonal workers. The majority of retailers are small businesses — 71 percent of retail stores have fewer than 10 employees. The industry supports one of every four jobs in the United States.

That's good news for Berkshire County, because retail is the second-largest job sector in the Berkshires, employing 7,582 people, 11 percent of the county's total workforce. Retail is one of the country's most technically advanced and innovative sectors, offering varied and rewarding career possibilities.

Although sales jobs are mostly closely associated with the retail sector, 44 percent of its employees do not work in sales positions. There are accountants, artists, computer programmers, merchandise displayers, architects and engineers, protective workers and more. So, if you want an engaging, competitive career, consider a job in the retail industry.

Half of all employed teenagers work in the retail sector. More than one-third of retail employees work part time, and 60 percent are women. Retail stores account for 70 percent of the country's gross national product. And despite the rise in online shopping opportunities, industry research indicates that 90 percent of U.S. retail sales still take place in brick-and-mortar locations.

Think small: Support our small businesses all year long, too. There are 3,740 commercial establishments in Berkshire County, and 88 percent are considered to be small businesses. These firms employ more than 51,000 people.

When we support small businesses, jobs are created and local communities preserve or develop a unique culture. The money spent at small businesses also stays local because it goes back into the local economy. Retailers will be spending the next few weeks preparing for Small Business Saturday, which takes place the day after Black Friday.

Berkshire County knows firsthand the importance of the holiday season for our local retailers, so, please shop locally this holiday season. Thanksgiving falls at an opportune time on the calendar. We are heading into the holiday season, when we are reminded of what is most important to us.

We will soon be approaching the end of the year, when we take stock of the past year and set goals for the coming one. We can all find more room for gratitude in both our personal and professional lives.

Gratitude helps recruitment and retention, improves employee well-being, and builds team resilience. Gratitude isn't just a holiday tradition, it's a cultural amplifier that impacts employee morale, loyalty, collaboration, productivity, and even conflict resolution.

Leaders can start building more gratitude in workplaces today by consistently saying "thank you," giving public recognition for achievements, and showing genuine concern for employee's personal and professional lives.

Most importantly, leadership must lead by example. This is a perfect time of year to translate our feelings of thankfulness into daily practice, and to thank our veterans and support our small businesses, not just during the holidays but all year long.

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