

Berkshire County lost 7 percent of its workforce since the pandemic. Our new series sets out to find where they went

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Even before the coronavirus pandemic, General Dynamics Mission Systems in Pittsfield has struggled to recruit candidates for its relatively high-paying technical jobs.
LARRY PARNASS — THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE

In July 2019, eight months before COVID-19 hit Massachusetts, Berkshire County’s workforce was at its typical summer peak, with more than 67,000 people working or officially unemployed. This past July, that number was 4,675 lower. Where did they go?

On Saturday, The Eagle begins a series of reports on how the coronavirus pandemic has affected a pillar of the local economy: jobs.

In Project Paycheck, [Larry Parnass](#) explores dramatic shifts affecting the Berkshire County workforce, as employers seek to recover from the pandemic and workers engage in what one local expert, Heather Boulger, [calls](#) “the great reassessment.”

In his first dispatch, Parnass maps reasons why the county’s workforce remains at its smallest size in decades.

Rather than provide standard news stories, Parnass will be inviting readers to join as partners in the reporting process as he follows story leads, conducts interviews — and opens his notebook to share impressions, data, graphics, photos, video and audio. We hope to include your advice, tips and suggestions in these dispatches. We invite you to engage with Project Paycheck in the

coming weeks. We think you'll find it a fresh approach that deepens public understanding of a crucial issue.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

What's your work life story of 2021? Have a suggestion for this project? Share your thoughts with the project's lead writer, Larry Parnass, by email at lparnass@berkshireeagle.com or by calling him at 413-588-8341.

As with any region, the strength, and resilience, of the Berkshire economy depends on people working and getting paid.

Local experts are hopeful the missing 7 percent of the workforce can be restored. But, at the same time, they caution that the pandemic broke the mold on how people view work. Now that the economy is improving, Berkshire employers are eager to ramp up, but they struggle to find help.

Let us know what you think, and thanks for reading.