

Berkshire Eagle – November 7, 2023 – Berkshire Business News
Heather Boulger; November is a month to remember



Logan Finn, an Army veteran, talks with Susan Slattery about work with UPS, during a MassHire Berkshire Career Center job fair in 2018, in this file photo. The Career Center is holding a job fair for veterans Nov. 30 at the Holiday Inn & Suites in Pittsfield.
BEN GARVER - THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE

PITTSFIELD — This is the season to be grateful.

For many, the month of November provides us with an opportunity to show our appreciation and thankfulness for our friends, family members and loved ones. For some, however, gratitude can be challenging to find when there are so many people to help, so many meetings to attend, so many deadlines, so many obligations, so much daily stress, and just not enough time in the day. 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 veterans 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 are able to celebrate our blessings and freedoms because of their sacrifices.

There are 7,908 military veterans living in the Berkshires. 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.

As part of Hire a Veteran month, the [MassHire Berkshire Career Center](#) in Pittsfield is [hosting](#) a multi-industry job fair on Nov. 30 at the Holiday Inn & Suites, formerly the Crowne Plaza Hotel, in Pittsfield. The event takes place from 12:30-to 3:00 p.m. The first half hour is reserved for veterans seeking jobs.

The Berkshire County unemployment rate [is](#) 2.5 percent. There are currently 59,644 Berkshire residents in the labor force, and 8,141 of them are employed. This is better news than a year ago, when the Berkshire unemployment rate was 3.9 percent. It is our goal at MassHire to help the remaining 1,503 unemployed county residents and those looking for career changes to connect them to the myriad workforce programs so they can find their perfect employment opportunity here in the Berkshires.

There were 2,800 job postings in the Berkshires on the [JobQuest](#) website this week, and hundreds more posted on other venues. For an overview of local workforce services and employment opportunities, visit [MassHireBerkshire.com](#).

- Think small: Support our small businesses all year long, too. There are 3,728 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 this year on Nov. 25, the day after Black Friday. It's shaping up to be a holly, jolly holiday shopping season, according to the National Retail Federation's [annual holiday spending forecast](#).

Holiday spending is expected to be healthy even with recent inflationary challenges. According to the NRF, holiday retail sales will grow between 3.6 percent over 2022, while 92 percent of consumers plan to celebrate the winter holidays, which include Hanukkah and Kwanzaa in addition to Christmas.

This year, 43 percent of holiday shoppers began to buy gifts before November. On average, consumers have budgeted \$875 for gifts and seasonal items like decorations, cars, food and candy.

The NRF expects retailers will hire between 450,000 and 600,000 seasonal workers. The majority of retailers are small businesses — 71 percent of retail stores have fewer than 10 employees. The industry, as a whole, 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, which is 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.

Berkshire County knows firsthand the importance of the holiday season for our local retailers, so, please shop local 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. 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.

Heather Boulger is the executive director of the MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board in Pittsfield.