

## INSIDE THE JOB MARKET

# Resources exist to bridge the gap in job openings

PITTSFIELD — There are too many jobs without people to fill them in Berkshire County right now, 2.5 job openings for every job seeker. Local employers are finding it hard to grow, compete and thrive.

Every day we hear about the challenges Berkshire employers of every size and industry continue to face to find enough workers to fill those open positions. Nationally, there are 9.8 million job openings, but only 5.9 unemployed workers, according to U.S. data.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, thousands of people are entering the workforce, which is good news. However, the current labor force participation rate of 62.8 percent does not match up with the pre-COVID-19 pandemic rate of 63.4 percent. If the percentage of people participating in the labor force now was the same as it was in February 2020 — the month before the country shut down because of COVID — there would be 1.9 million more people in the workforce today. This shortage is impacting all employers in every industry.

So where did all the workers go?

Several factors have come together to cause the ongoing shortage. During the pandemic, early retirements and decreased immigration left the nation in a worker deficit and boosted unemployment benefits and stimulus payments added to the reluctance of people returning to work.

According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 27 percent of unemployed workers indicated a need to stay home and care for children or other family members, while 25 percent indicated that their health had taken priority over their job search.

Here are some other factors that contributed to the shortage:

- Early retirement. It grew from 48 percent in 2019 to 50.3 percent in 2021.
- The drop in immigration. U.S. Census data shows immigration to



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*Inside the Job Market*

our country dropped by 76 percent between 2019 and 2020.

- Lack of access to child-care. The employment level in the childcare industry is 10 percent lower than before the pandemic. The number of women participating in the labor force has dropped from 70 percent to 55 percent, the lowest percentage since the 1970s.

- A surge of new businesses. More than 4 million new businesses have started in the last two years.

The gap between open job positions and unemployed individuals is wide, but it is slowly narrowing. The national hiring rate of 3.7 percent is higher than the 2.3 percent national quit rate. In Berkshire County, through August, unemployment has remained at 2.9 percent since June, according to the state office of Labor and Workforce Development. Local unemployment was 3.9 percent in August 2022.

As of last month, the county's total labor force was 60,735, with 58,996 residents employed and 1,776 unemployed and collecting jobless benefits.

So where do you go for help?

**Employers:** The MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board is here to support Berkshire businesses at every level of their business cycle and to help them connect to money-saving services and resources offered through state workforce development, economic development, and education partners. During fiscal 2023, MassHire provided 877 companies with access to training resources, job fairs, layoff aversion services, and a variety of marketing, outreach, grant referrals, and vital business insights. Our mission is simple: Your success is our success. Let's work together to identify and solve your workforce needs. Reach out today to our market maker at [Industry@MassHireBerkshire.com](mailto:Industry@MassHireBerkshire.com) and learn how MassHire can help with your workforce needs.

**Company training:** The Berk-



BEN GARVER — THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE

Robbin Simonetti and Angie Ligner research job opportunities at the 2014 Berkshire Career Fair, in this file photo. Career fairs are one of the initiatives that the MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board is making available to provide workers to fill the county's job shortages.

shire Workforce Board can help companies access Workforce Training Fund resources to help upgrade their workforce. Visit [www.com-mcorp.org/wtffp](http://www.com-mcorp.org/wtffp), or for safety grants, go to <https://www.mass.gov/the-dias-workplace-safety-training-grant> to reduce the risk of worksite injuries and prevention. Upskilling employees is more than a strategic decision in order to maintain each staff's competitive edge.

**Job seekers:** As a job seeker, the MassHire Berkshire Career Center can help identify your strengths and opportunities for improvement, formulate a career plan, and outline a variety of education and training programs to help get you started. At the Career Center, job seekers, career changers and youth have access to a wide range of free high-quality job search resources and training programs. There are specialized programs for the unemployed, underemployed, Veterans, teens and young adults, workers with

disabilities, the formerly incarcerated, mature workers and DTA and SNAP recipients. There are career fairs and networking opportunities throughout the year to connect to area employers with job openings. Visit MassHire at [www.masshire-berkshireCC.com](http://www.masshire-berkshireCC.com) to connect with a career coach today.

The MassHire System has a number of entry-level training programs to help unemployed and underemployed residents gain skills and find employment within our critical industries. Recruitment is currently underway for:

- Advanced manufacturing training at McCann Technical School, Berkshire Community College, and the Berkshire Innovation Center.
- Nursing and medical assistant training in collaboration with Berkshire Health Systems and Integritus Healthcare.
- Hospitality and culinary arts training at Berkshire Community College along with a number of

online certificate programs and courses.

- Many additional Berkshire partners offer online credit and non-credit courses and trainings like Adult Basic Education, English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and a variety of other opportunities. Some courses are free. Others include a nominal fee.

September celebrates Workforce Development month by recognizing the contributions of workforce professionals and highlighting initiatives which support job seeker and employers. Whether you are an employer, a job seeker, a career changer, new to the Berkshires or a young person, reach out to the MassHire team today to help Berkshire employers and residents thrive.

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