

7

INSIDE THE JOB MARKET

MassHire works to close hiring gap



Heather Boulger
Inside the Job Market

Right now there continues to be more job openings without people to fill them. There are 2.5 job openings for every job seeker.

As a result, employers are finding it hard to grow, compete and thrive.

Every day MassHire hears from Berkshire employers of every size and industry that they continue to face challenges to find enough workers to fill open jobs. U.S. data shows 9.8 million job openings, but only 5.9 million unemployed workers.

The good news is that the market continues to stabilize and return to more normal hiring patterns, there is ongoing interest in flexible work schedules, and there's an uptick in youth hiring. People are also less likely to job hop. The MassHire system is available to help both the employer and job seeker with their workforce needs.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are thousands of people entering the workforce, which is good news. However, the labor force participation rate of 62.8 percent does not match what it was before the pandemic at 63.4 percent. If the percentage of people participating in the labor force was the same as in February 2020, there would be 1.9 million more people in the workforce today. This shortage is impacting all employers in every industry.

So where did the workers go? There are several factors that have come together to cause the ongoing shortage. During the pandemic, early retirements and less immigration left the nation in a worker deficit, and boosted unemployment benefits and stimulus payments added to the reluctance of people returning to work. The lack of child care access and new business starts also con-



BEN GARVER — THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE

MassHire Berkshire Career Center held an advanced manufacturing job fair in Pittsfield in 2019 for job seekers who have taken their advanced manufacturing training or who have an interest in the field. Job fairs are among the many tools the center has to help fill the hiring gap in the Berkshires.

tributed to the lower labor force, but these trends are changing.

The gap between open jobs and unemployed individuals is slowly narrowing. The current national hiring rate of 3.7 percent is higher than the 2.3 percent national quit rate. In Berkshire County, the July 2024 unemployment rate is 4.3 percent, a tick below the Massachusetts rate of 4.6 percent, compared to 3.3 percent from a year ago. This reflects 65,675 people in the Berkshire labor force with 62,871 employed and 2,804 unemployed.

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

Employers, MassHire is here to support Berkshire businesses at every level of your business cycle and connect to money-saving services and resources offered through state workforce development, economic development, and education partners to help employers grow and thrive. During fiscal 2024, MassHire assisted 777 companies access 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 suc-

cess. Let's work together to identify and solve your workforce needs. Reach out today to our market maker at Industry@MassHireBerkshire.com and learn how MassHire can help with your workforce needs.

COMPANY TRAINING

The Berkshire Workforce Board can help your company access Workforce Training Fund resources to help upgrade your workforce by visiting commcorp.org/wtffp and Safety Grants 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 your staff's competitive edge.

As a job seeker, the MassHire Berkshire Career Center can help you 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 unemployed, underemployed, veterans,

teens and young adults, workers with disabilities, 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 masshireberkshireCC.com to connect with a career coach today.

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

- Advanced Manufacturing training at McCann Tech, Berkshire Community College and the Berkshire Innovation Center;
- Nursing and medical assistant training in collaboration with Berkshire Health Systems, Integritus Healthcare and CHP Berkshire.
- Hospitality and culinary arts training, as well as early child care education at Berkshire Community College and number of online certificate programs and courses.
- Many additional Berkshire partners offer online credit and noncredit courses and trainings, adult basic education, English speakers of other languages (ESOL), and a variety of other opportunities. Some courses are free while others have a nominal fee.

September celebrates Workforce Development month to recognize the contributions of workforce professionals and highlight initiatives which support job seekers 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!

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