

Forecast raises hiring optimism

Some of area's biggest employers adding workers

By Jenny Munro
STAFF WRITER
jmunro@greenvillenews.com

Hiring is slowly gaining steam in the Upstate and nationally as employers become slightly more optimistic about where the economy is headed and less uncertain about adding to their payroll.

That uptick in optimism can be seen locally. Carolina Ale House is hiring up to 120 people for a Dec. 13 opening.

Century Plastics is expanding and expects to create 25 new jobs. BMW Manufacturing Co. expects to hire 1,600 new contract workers by the end of the year. Michelin North America is hiring at all its facilities.

While some of this hiring will be completed in the fourth quarter of 2010, more is expected in the first three months of 2011.

Job seekers said they were glad to see even

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a glimmer of light on the jobs horizon.

"It's time for hiring to open up," said James Granby, a Greenville construction worker who has been unemployed for seven months. "There's not a lot of building going on. I don't know how to do anything else. So I'm just hanging on until construction turns. You know, it's always slow this time of year."

Betsy White, who said she has a job but wants to find another one that pays better, said, "It's just so discouraging. You feel like you can't take a chance and leave your job because you might not find another

one. If I can make it work financially, I want to go back to school and become a nurse. They're always in demand."

Job prospects in the Upstate region appear best, according to a first-quarter Manpower Employment Outlook Survey, in the durable and nondurable goods manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, information, financial activities, professional and business services, leisure and hospitality and other services sectors.

Employers in education, health services and government said they plan to reduce payroll. The construction and transportation/utilities sectors expect no change in headcount.

Mark Vitner, senior economist with Wells Fargo Economics Group, said

he "sees hiring gradually improving over the next few years." But it probably will take three to four years to replace the jobs lost during the recession.

"It's not going to get back to where we were several years ago" for some time, he said.

Bruce Yandle, dean emeritus of Clemson University's College of Business and Behavioral Science, agreed but said "there is an alive and breathing economy out there," one in which even the unemployment situation is beginning to improve.

More than 101,000 workers have been added to the nation's payrolls in the past 12 months — not many, but a positive sign.

Still, the going is slow. Manufacturers, who have led the U.S. econom-

ic recovery, added 170,000 jobs during the first seven months of 2010, but employment declined for the fourth consecutive month in November, said Dave Huether, chief economist for the National Association of Manufacturers.

That is a further signal that "the pace of the manufacturing recovery has slowed since the first half of the year. The decline in manufacturing employment in November was not driven by any one industry, but rather due to the fact that 13 of the 21 major industries posted moderate employment declines while only eight posted moderate increases."

William C. Dunkelberg, chief economist for the National Federation of Independent Business, said small business owners reported net new job cre-

ation in November. It wasn't much — 0.01 workers per firm — but better than the previous month.

Another concern is that the number of those unemployed for at least six months remained unchanged in November "at an alarmingly high rate of 41.8 percent," Huether said.

Even with these issues still facing the economy and employers, Greenville-Mauldin-Easley area businesses expect to hire at a "steady pace" in the first three months of next year, according to Manpower.

Between January and March, 14 percent of those surveyed said they expect to hire more workers while 4 percent anticipate reducing their payroll. Another 2 percent aren't certain of their hiring plans.