Job hopes here

Unemployment falls; hiring forecast 'vigorous'

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South Carolina's unemployment rate fell for the sixth straight month — to 9.3 percent in January — and the Manpower Employment Outlook survey forecasts the Greenville MSA is expected to be the strongest in the nation for second quarter hiring.

The state's January jobless rate is down from a revised December rate of 9.6 percent. The national unemployment rate was 8.3 percent in January.

Greenville County's jobless rate in January was 7.1 percent, down from 7.2 percent a month earlier. That gave it the second lowest unemployment rate in the state. Marion County, at 19.2 percent, suffered the highest rate of unemployment while Lexington County, at 6.9 percent, was the lowest.

"I wish I could find some of those jobs," said Karen Duckett, a Greenville woman who has been looking for clerical work for four months. "I know I have the skills to do the work. But I can't find anybody hiring. I'm thinking about taking some medical training. They always seem to have jobs."

The Manpower survey said employers in the Greenville-Mauldin-Easley are expecting to hire at a "vigorous pace" in the second quarter. Of those participating in the survey, 26 percent of the companies said they plan to hire in the April to June period

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tops in nation



5,000; and construction, down 2,000. Manufacturing experienced an increase of 100 jobs during January.

For the past 12 months, employment increased by about 29,900 jobs. Manufacturing led the annual job growth with 11,700 new jobs.

Jobs are out there, said John Baker, director of Greenville Works. But candidates for the jobs often need additional skills.

Jones agreed: "We have plenty of job listings in the SCWorks centers," he said. But many are either entry-level positions or highly skilled positions.

"We're actually in a 14-year educational cycle" for young people to be ready for a job, Baker said, because post-secondary education or training is needed.

A recent manufacturing job fair, sponsored by Greenville Works, attracted 20 staffing agencies and more than 500 candidates, he said.

A major need in South Carolina is "basic manufacturing training just to put people in alignment with the jobs," he said. "And we need to build a base of skilled workers," particularly machinists and multiskilled maintenance technicians.

"A lot of the lower-skilled jobs have been phased out," he said, and skilled jobs often take a couple of years of training

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while 2 percent plan to reduce their work force. Another 67 percent expect to maintain their current payroll and 5 percent are not certain of their plans.

The 24 percent net employment outlook is considerably stronger than the net employment outlook of 2 percent in the first quarter.

Jobs appear to be best in construction, durable goods manufacturing, nondurable goods manufacturing, transportation and utilities, wholesale, and retail trade among other sectors, according to Manpower.

"The economy is improving. But everybody is wanting more skilled folks. There are a whole lot of people who are struggling," said Steve Hand, head of Greenville Technical College's Quick Jobs program. "There are people who are paralyzed with fear, with doubt."

This is the sixth month that South Carolina has experienced a decline in the state jobless rate. However, the drop was primarily the result of workers — an estimated 7,900 — dropping out of the labor force rather than the creation of jobs.

"We can't wrap our hands around why the drop" in the labor force, said Adrienne Fairwell, director of public information for the state Department of Employment and Workforce. The reason could be attrition, discouragement, moving out of state, going to school or retirement, but it's impossible to find out through a household survey.

Dean Jones, head of Greenville County's SCWorks centers, said frustration with the job search and the inability of job seekers to align their skills with employer needs is probably the major reason for the large number of labor force dropouts.

According to a payroll survey of businesses, the number of jobs in the state fell by 33,300, primarily in retail trade, down 8,300; professional and business services, down 5,800; leisure and hospitality, down

and a couple of years of experience to produce valuable employees.

"As a community if we really want to tackle something, we need to work on this," he said, adding it should include K-12 education, full employer support, technical college training and apprenticeships.

In addition, candidates have to learn to communicate their skills to employers, Jones said.

He added, "An employer told some students recently, 'It's not enough to give me a resume. What skills did you use to put together this resume? What research did you do? You have to show me what you did.'"

The number of January's officially unemployed workers — those actively involved in a job search — was the lowest since November 2008. Unemployment statistics do not include discouraged workers who have stopped looking or part-time employees who want full-time jobs.

After annual benchmarking, South Carolina's average unemployment rate for 2011 was 10.3 percent, down from an average of 11.2 percent reported in 2010.

Seven states had higher January unemployment rates than South Carolina — Nevada, 12.7 percent; California and Rhode Island, 10.9 percent; North Carolina, 10.2 percent; Mississippi, 9.9 percent; Florida, 9.6 percent; and Illinois, 9.4 percent. However, Michigan came in below South Carolina at 9 percent. North Dakota posted the lowest rate at 3.2 percent.

"As I've stated in the past, the continued decline in the unemployment rate is something for South Carolinians to be excited about, and we know from the SCWorks system that the jobs are out there," said Abraham J. Turner, executive director of the state Department of Employment and Workforce.