Market continues to make gains



Job seekers line up to register to attend a job fair May 30 in Atlanta. U.S. employers advertised slightly more jobs in May and hired more workers. JOHN AMIS/AP FILE

Job openings, new hires improve in May

Retail accounted for the bulk of employment ads

By Christopher S. Rugaber
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. employers advertised slightly more jobs in May and hired more workers, further signs of steady improvement in the job market.

The Labor Department said Tuesday that job openings rose 28,000 to 3.83 million in May from April. That's close to February's 3.9 million, which was the highest in five years.

A measure of overall hiring increased 46,000 to 4.4 million. That's still lower than a year ago.

MORE FODDER FOR THE FED

A stronger economy makes it more likely that the Federal Reserve could begin to taper its stimulus later this year. Chairman Ben Bernanke said last month that the Fed would slow its bond purchases later this year and end them next year if the economy continues to improve.

» Bernanke and Fed Vice Chairwoman Janet Yellen have both said they monitor the job openings report for signs that the job market is improving in a sustainable way.

» The Fed will release minutes from its June meeting Wednesday. The report should provide further insight into what Bernanke and other policymakers are thinking.

The job market remains competitive, despite stronger hiring this year. There are nearly 3.1 unemployed, on average, for each open job. That's down from a peak four years ago of nearly 7 to 1. In a healthy economy, the ratio is typically 2 to 1.

The Job Openings and Labor Turnover survey comes after the government said last week that employers added 195,000 net jobs in June. Last week's report showed all jobs added, minus the number of people who were laid off, quit or retired. The unemployment rate was unchanged at still-high 7.6 percent.

In May, nearly all the openings were at retail businesses, a sign that many of the jobs being created are low-paying.