

Job openings up 2 months in row



PAUL SAKUMA / The Associated Press

Help-wanted signs posted at a Baskin Robbins store in Mountain View, Calif., are part of a recent trend of increased hiring.

Expert: Hiring recovery still has a long way to go

By Christopher S. Rugaber
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Companies in March advertised the most jobs since the peak of the 2008 financial crisis, a sign that hiring is likely to remain healthy in the months ahead.

Job openings rose by 99,000 to 3.1 million in March, the Labor Department said Wednesday. That's the highest level of openings since September 2008 and the second straight monthly increase.

March's figure is much higher than the 2.1 million job openings posted in July 2009, one month after the recession ended. But it is still significantly below the 4.4 million openings recorded in December 2007, when the recession began.

Even with the increase, there were 4.3 unem-

ployed people, on average, competing for each available job in March. That's higher than the ratio of 2 to 1 that economists consider healthy.

Still, job openings have risen 14 percent since January. That's been matched by greater hiring: businesses added more than 200,000 jobs each month from February to April, the best three-month showing in five years. The unemployment rate has fallen almost a full percentage point in the past five months.

The report suggests the recovery in the job market has a long way to go to return to healthy levels. The number of open jobs in February was revised downward by nearly 70,000. And even if all the job openings were filled by unemployed workers, more than 10 million peo-

ple would remain out of work.

"For three out of four unemployed workers, there simply are no jobs," said Heidi Shierholz, an economist at the Economic Policy Institute.

The Labor Department's report, known as the Job Openings and Labor Turnover survey, illustrates the level of churn that takes place in the job market each month. In March, a little over 4 million people were hired and about 3.8 million people left their jobs. The difference between those two figures is similar to the 221,000 net gain in jobs reported in that month's employment report.

Job openings rose in March, in manufacturing, construction, retail, and education and health services, the report showed.