

Workforce Development: Get the Facts

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According to the United States Department of Labor, in February, 27 states recorded over-the-month unemployment rate increases, 7 states had rate decreases, and 16 states had no rate change including Massachusetts. The Berkshire County unemployment rate jumped to 10.4% in January 2010. I am often asked to provide workforce statistics and I always let people know that I am not an economist, but always try to capture the information that people and businesses request. So here are the workforce facts according to the experts – the Department of Labor.

Past three economic downturns - Small and large firms have shown different behaviors during the past 3 economic downturns. In the early 1990s, there were more net job losses in small firms than in large firms. The 2001 recession showed the opposite: large firms experienced more net job losses during the downturn and then continued to show net losses into 2003. In the early part of this recession, however, neither group shows a clear majority of job losses. All firm sizes have been similarly affected by the recession.

The labor force is growing more slowly - A substantial slowdown in the pace of labor force growth is projected from the 2015-25 period as the baby-boom generation retires (born between 1946-1964).

The labor force is getting older - The median age of the labor force is rising. 20% of men in the labor force are veterans. The median age of these workers is 50 years, compared with 39 years for nonveterans.

More women are working today than in the past - women account for 47% of the labor force, up from 40% in 1975. Among married-couple families where both work, about 1/5 of the women earn more than their spouse.

Minorities are the fastest growing part of the labor force - Asians and Hispanics have the fastest labor force growth primarily because of immigration. White non-Hispanics account for about 71% of the

labor force in 2008. Hispanics account for 13%, black non-Hispanic for about 11%; and Asians and other groups about 5%.

Immigrants are found at the high and low ends of the education scale - Only about 7% of 25-34 year old workers born in the United States have not completed high school. In contrast, about 26% of recent immigrants in that age group have not obtained a high school diploma. At the same time recent immigrants age 25-34 are more than twice as likely as their U.S. counterparts to have a master's or higher degree.

Education Pays - College graduates age 25 and over earn nearly twice as much as workers who stopped with a high school diploma.

Workers with computer skills are in demand - Of the 10 fastest growing occupations, the top 5 are computer related.

The 10 occupations that will generate the most jobs range widely in their skills requirements - Systems analysts, retail salespersons, cashiers, general managers and top executives, truck drivers, office clerks, register nurses, computer support specialists, personal care and home health aides, teacher assistants are the 10 occupations projected to add a total of about 5 million jobs during 1998-2008, nearly 1/4 of the projected job growth over the decade.

Benefits account for more than 1/4 of total compensation - Legally required benefits (Social Security, Medicare, Unemployment, insurance, and workers' compensation) account for the largest share of benefit costs nearly 30% of the total.

Workers will be supporting more Social Security recipients - The Social Security Administration expects that before the middle of the 21st century there will be only 2 workers for every Social Security beneficiary; compared to 5 workers per beneficiary in 1960.

The temporary help industry has grown rapidly - The number of jobs in temporary help industry grew sharply for much of the 1980s and 1990s. The industry accounts for less than 3% of total nonfarm employment. Workers employed by temporary help agencies work in all sectors of the economy, but notably in the services and manufacturing industries.

The most common alternative employment arrangement is independent contractor - About 13 million people work under alternative employment arrangements, as independent contractors, temporary help workers, contract workers, or on-call workers.

Most mothers work - Nearly 3/4 of all mothers are in the labor force. Even among mothers with very young children, more than 60% are in the labor force. Unmarried mothers are more likely than married mothers to work.

Married couples are working longer - Among married couples, the combined weekly hours of husbands and wives are rising. In 1969, couples worked an average of

56 hours/week. By 2000, this has increased to 67 hours.

The workplace is becoming safer - A total of 5.7 million injuries and illnesses occurred in private industry workplaces in 1999. This resulted in the lowest rate recorded (6.3 cases for every 100 full time workers) since data collection began. Highway crashes are the leading cause of on-the-job fatalities, followed by falls, and homicides.

Need help with your Job Search or to find an Employee? - Berkshire Works One-Stop Career Centers can assist with your workforce development needs. www.BerkshireWorks.org or (413) 499-2220. ■

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