

Special Report: Jobs

Jobs 2012: temps and techs; Chicago employment growth expected to lag as job-skills mismatch widens

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Want to be sure to have a job in 2012? Take up nursing or truck driving.

These sure-fire occupations have faced worker shortages for years and the trend is forecast to continue.

Food-service workers, computer support technicians, construction laborers and security guards are just some of the jobs that will be in high demand in the Chicago region in the next decade, according to research from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Illinois Department of Employment Security.

Farmers, bank tellers and electronic component assemblers, on the other hand, will have a hard time finding work, the government research says.

Chicago's workforce is poised to increase 10.5% by 2012, lagging the forecast rise of 14.8% nationally but outpacing Illinois' predicted 6.8% growth, according to Economy.com Inc. and the U.S. Department of Labor.

Health care is expected to create the most jobs, followed by the restaurant and hotel business and the business services sector.

Still, when it comes to forecasting job growth, making 10-year predictions is a "funny business," says Nik Theodore, director of the Center for Urban Economic Development at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

A decade ago, the center predicted that biotechnology and advanced telecommunications held the most promise for growth in the region. That was before the tech wreck. Even the Bureau of Labor Statistics cautions in its 2002-12 employment projection report that any attempt to forecast long-term occupational employment demand "is subject to a great deal of uncertainty."

Nonetheless, plenty of government organizations, industry groups and economists attempt the feat.

Yawning skills gap

Figuring out the region's fastest-growing occupations is a daily challenge for Paul O'Connor, executive director at World Business Chicago, a quasi-governmental body that works to promote economic development. In the past 18 months, the organization has held three summits on health care, manufacturing and transportation/distribution to determine how to prepare the region's workforce for the future. The key finding: There won't be enough workers with the right skills to fill the jobs.

"There is enormous demand and enormous opportunity, but a huge difficulty in getting people trained to do the work," Mr. O'Connor says.

Health care, not surprisingly, is predicted to create 94,800 new jobs in the Chicago area by 2012, according to Economy.com, a West Chester, Pa.-based research firm. But there isn't the local training capacity for all the nurses and lab workers that will be needed.

Global trade hub

A similar skills dilemma faces Chicago's manufacturing sector. While local manufacturers are expected to shed 20,500 local jobs by 2012, the industry has a chance to thrive-with Chicago ranking as the largest manufacturing

city in the Midwest based on the value of goods produced-as long as factories are able to hire enough highly skilled workers to operate increasingly computerized plants, Mr. O'Connor says.

As for the transportation and distribution segment, FedEx Corp. Chief Economist Gene Huang says Chicago's roots as a cargo catch basin position the area to benefit from the ever-growing global supply chain. Exports from Chicago are increasing at almost twice the national rate: 23.7% for the Chicago region through July vs. 12.9% for the U.S. Imports rose 14.9% in the Chicago region and 14.2% in the U.S. in the period. Chicago ranks as the second-largest air import district in the nation after New York. Economy.com predicts the local wholesale trade sector-which includes the warehousing and distribution of goods-will create 31,900 new jobs by 2012.

``Chicago has a strong industrial base, the infrastructure in place to facilitate trade flow and the financial services center to provide the credit," says Mr. Huang. ``You can't find any city in the U.S. that has all three. Chicago has a huge advantage."

Another growth area: business services, already Chicago's largest employment sector. Business services-which includes professions such as accounting and consulting as well as administrative staffing and temporary jobs-accounts for 15.5% of the local workforce and is expected to represent 17.2% by 2012, according to Global Insight, a Lexington, Mass.-based economics research firm. Manufacturing, which now accounts for slightly less than 11% of the region's jobs, down from 14% in 2000, will continue to decline, to 9.9% of the local job market.

Asian competition

Temporary services and administrative jobs are forecast to increase by 58,200, while professional and technical services are predicted to create 46,300 jobs, according to Economy.com.

Fueling the rise in temporary services workers is a fundamental shift in how companies hire, says the University of Illinois' Mr. Theodore. Companies are turning to staffing agencies for all types of temporary jobs: clerical, manual labor and high-tech, he says, a reflection of the faster-paced changes in the global economy.

In professional services, growth has slowed from the explosive pace of the 1990s but is starting to come back. Christopher Dalton, CEO of **Acquity Group** LLC, a 3-year-old Chicago-based technology consulting firm, has been on a recruiting binge, hiring 80 people in the past two years and looking to hire another 30. Nonetheless, it's ``a struggle to find good, qualified people," he says.

Craig Scherer, co-founder of Chicago-based design firm Insight Product Development, is likewise seeking more highly skilled engineers and researchers than in the past. One reason: Asian manufacturers are offering free industrial design services to win more production business. To compete, Mr. Scherer has had to offer more-advanced technologies, which are difficult to outsource.

``It's hard for a company like ours to compete with free," he says.

Adding jobs: Occupations with biggest projected job growth over the next 10 years * Losing jobs: Occupations with biggest projected job declines over the next 10 years.