

Layoffs, layoffs, and layoffs

Click on any channel, flip through the newspaper or check out the hottest blogs and chances are that dreaded "L" word remains the news of the day.



By Tim Maier

No one is hiring. Unemployment is reaching record levels and there is no end to the dismal news.

Can it get any worse? It did last month.

The number of unemployed reached 12.5 million in February, an increase of 851,000 from the previous month. In the last year, the number of unemployed increased by about 5 million while the unemployment rate rose to the highest level since 1983 from 3.3 to 8.1 percent, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. More than half of those unemployed became jobless in the last four months. Throw in those who were forced to take part-time or temporary positions to pay the bills, and the unemployment rate would have been a record high of nearly 15 percent in February.

But don't believe everything you read, especially when it comes to future employment opportunities in the Baltimore/Washington corridor.

In the next few years, tens of thousands of jobs will be flowing into the region from the Base Realignment and Closure program to thousands of census jobs that everyone seems to forget to count. Others are projecting the Baltimore/Washington corridor to become the next Silicon Valley.

"Communications and electronics are going to change the dynamics of this region," said Karen Holt, BRAC manager for the Chesapeake Science and Security Corridor that represents counties in Maryland, Pennsylvania and Delaware.

Holt said at least 50 percent of the jobs will come from those already living in the region. But as people move here, and surrounding businesses move to increase services the economic boom could be as high as \$13 billion. "We like to say it is the most significant economic impact since World War II," Holt said.

Can it get any better?

President Obama's \$789.5 billion stimulus package could bring as much as \$50 billion to the Baltimore/Washington corridor for high tech, biotech, research and subcontracting work and 66,000 jobs to Maryland. "The pipeline starts here," said Praba Murugaiah, CEO of Corp-Corp, a Washington DC-based online marketplace for IT consultants. "Within six to nine months you will see an impact."

Murugaiah analyzed data on more than 33,000 job openings from more than 750 employers, and he found that the hottest job market for IT consulting work is in the Washington/Baltimore corridor.

Murugaiah suggests "the number of outsourcing jobs will be reduced because people earning \$120,000 will be willing to work for \$60,000."

So far, however the recession has been a boom for the Washington-based Kellen Company, which provides outsourcing services to associations. Rick Cristol, president the Kellen Company, said associations are downsizing and buying fractional employees, such as a meeting planner or membership development coordinator or public relations specialist. Requests for outsourced management services jumped 20 percent in the past 6 to 12 months, and the company increased staff to meet the demands. "Associations are becoming more like businesses. They want to generate a surplus so they can do more programs."

There may be tens of thousands of jobs but there are still more unemployed than there are full time jobs, making it a very competitive market.

George Little, spokesman for the CIA, says they are "absolutely hiring" for "highly qualified analysts, clandestine officers, engineers and scientists," but he can't give the exact number. Asked what are the hot jobs? Little said, "We can't answer that because we don't want people to know what we are concentrating on."

Last year somewhere between 120,000 to 130,000 applied for jobs, Little said. The applications are rolling in this year as well. He refused to give how many are being hired.

That's top secret.

They are not the only ones swimming in a sea of applications.

The Census Bureau received so many requests that their test centers are booked up. Mike Marlow, an unemployed Baltimore copy editor, said he had a test date only to get a call back to say, his test had been cancelled. "They put me on a waiting list for fall testing."

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However, Census Bureau subcontractors, including Computer Sciences Corporation in Greenbelt are still interviewing and accepting applications. The odds of landing a job, however, might be comparable to winning the lottery.

BY THE NUMBERS

NATIONAL JOB LOSSES

- Construction 104,000
- Factories 168,000
- Retail 40,000
- Financial Companies 44,000
- Professional services 180,000
- Temporary jobs 78,000
- Hospitality 33,000

DOWNSIZING

- General Dynamics Corp cut 1,200 workers
- Northrop Grumman cut 750 workers

Source: Department of Labor, wire services, and company press reports

CORRIDOR HIRING IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS

- Andrews Air Force plans on 400 jobs
- Forte Meade predicts 5,800 jobs
- Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda hopes to add 1,400 jobs
- Subcontractors and offshoot jobs from BRAC could bring another 60,000 more jobs

Source: Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development

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