

Where help's wanted: health, tech, teaching

While most decline, some job categories still growing

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The "help wanted" signs may be few and far between in this economy, but they are out there, especially for nurses and computer programmers.

An Enquirer analysis of regional employment data finds that companies and agencies in the health care, IT and teaching sectors added 2,800 jobs in October, compared with the same month last year.

But overall, hiring has slowed in the past year across most sectors, the analysis shows.

One local information technology company is so desperate for qualified workers that the chief executive officer hung out at online gaming dives at night to recruit.

The firm had to pull in 15 programmers from India to meet a deadline.

"We couldn't get the skill set we needed in time to fit the bill," said Chris Boue, CEO of Blue Ash-based CH Mack Inc. "At the beginning of January 2007, we had 20 full-time programmers, and now we have 48 program

staff. And in the next three years, I expect that number to hit 80."

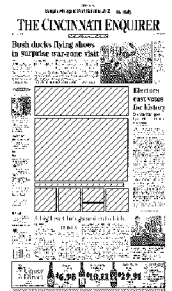
Overall, the biggest local jump in employment has come in the health care/social assistance sector, which includes jobs such as nurses, doctors and nursing home staff.

The sector added 1,500 jobs since last year in the 15-county Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky region, according to data from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.

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Health care jobs are more in demand due to an aging population and because "it's the type of job that is difficult to outsource in a major way," said Keith Ewald, the department's bureau chief for labor information.

In a 2006 report, Ewald's department predicted that the health sector would grow 19 percent statewide from 2004 to 2014. A new prediction is due early next year, and while agency officials say that the projections will probably be more tempered than the 2006 report, individual sectors such as



health care should still grow much faster than others.

West Chester Medical Center, which is under construction, anticipates having 270 new jobs to fill before it opens on May 4, and not all of those jobs are nurses, doctors, or even physical therapists.

“We’ll have a lot in the food service and environmental services area as well ... and those jobs as entry level can be hard to fill because of all the competition from restaurants and the like,” said hospital spokeswoman Stephanie Savicki.

In addition, health insurance company Humana announced Wednesday that it was adding 700 new jobs locally, including 400 at a new mail-order pharmacy distribution center in Walnut Hills.

According to area employment expert Rhonda Arledge, qualified applicants can still find a job. She said the unemployment rate for workers considered “skilled” or with a college degree is still only above 2 percent.

“That’s especially true in the health care field ... there’s a lot one can do with just one to two years of schooling,” said Arledge, regional director for Adecco, a national human resources and placement consulting firm.

IT is growing because computer jobs are being pulled back into the U.S. after being outsourced to foreign countries. Jobs in computer systems design and related services are expected to jump 30 percent between 2004-2014.

Even in the current downturn, Ewald said there is churn in the economy, meaning positions are constantly opening.

“We don’t have as many new jobs created and there are more people looking for jobs than there are positions – and yet we still have churn,” Ewald said. Because more people are looking for work, “that makes it more competitive when you are looking for a job.”

The increase in competition is borne out by indications that even the hot job sectors have slowed along with the economy. (Economists say the current recession began in December 2007.)

For example, health care jobs had grown nearly 24 percent locally between October 1998 and this year. But in the past 12 months, they have risen just 1.2 percent.

Hiring in other sectors has stalled, including finance and leisure and hospitality – and those sectors are expected to start shrinking. October was when the financial crisis really hit and layoffs started in that sector.

Meanwhile, the biggest local loser was manufacturing, which cut 1,700 jobs, or 1.4 percent between October 2007 and this October. The sector has been the hardest hit over the past 10 years, with employment down 20.4 percent since October 1998.

The loss of manufacturing jobs is a major reason many economists say Ohio likely has been in recession for much longer than the rest of the country, having never truly recovered from the downturn following the 9/11 attacks.

The local and national economies have “been in sorry shape for quite awhile, and the employment numbers as a whole peaked last December,” said Miami Universi-

ty economics professor Thomas Hall. “With the exception of transportation being down, there are no real surprises here.”



The Enquirer/Gary Landers

Chris Boue, president and CEO of CH Mack in Blue Ash, talks with his product development team. The company, which develops software for the health care IT industry, was so desperate for help, Boue searched out online gamers.



The Enquirer/Cara Owsley

At the new West Chester Medical Center, Chris Shields (foreground) and Derek Sullivan of Carpet Decorators work on the floor. The center anticipates filling 270 new jobs before it opens May 4.

Help wanted?

Here are the local job sectors that added or lost the most workers in the past year, compared to the 10-year trend in each sector. All but the top three fastest growing sectors saw significant slowdowns or losses in the past year.

Sector	No. of jobs lost/gained, Oct. '07-Oct. '08	10-year percentage change in jobs
Health care & social assistance	1,500	23.8
Educational & health services	1,200	11.8
All government	700	0
Local education	300	8
Prof. & technical services (IT)	100	16.7
Finance	0	17.1
Leisure & hospitality	0	16.3
Retail trade	0	-5.7
Information	-100	-24.4
Grocery stores	-500	9.6
State education	-700	6.9
Professional & business services	-1,300	15.7
Transportation & warehousing	-1,500	-1.8
Manufacturing	-1,700	-20.4

The 15-county region includes Hamilton, Butler, Warren, Clermont and Brown counties in Ohio; Boone, Campbell, Kenton, Bracken, Gallatin, Grant and Pendleton counties in Kentucky; and Dearborn, Franklin and Ohio counties in Indiana.

Source: Ohio Department of Job and Family Services

The Enquirer/Mike Nyerges