

Job seekers long for stability in shaky times

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ANDREA MORALES staff photographe

Jennifer Galdys of Henrietta works as a palliative care nurse at Strong Memorial Hospital. Health care is expected to weather a stormy economy, particularly as the population ages.

The economy stinks. Times are tough at your workplace, and there are rumors of yet another round of layoffs coming. You have trouble sleeping sometimes as you worry about your job.

So it'd be natural to feel just a touch of jealousy for people in careers a little more secure than yours. People like Jennifer Galdys, a nurse at Strong Memorial Hospital.

Or Christopher Davis, who works in customer service for Verizon Wireless' regional offices in Henrietta.

Or Richard Miller, a developer in the enterprise development department of Paychex Inc.'s information technology organization.

"I know we need nurses on the unit," said Galdys, 35, of Henrietta, a palliative care nurse. "We have positions open. Other units, same thing. I think it's probably that way in other hospitals. There are always positions for nurses."

Health care is one of the safer places to work if looking for job stability and security, but not the only.

According to state Labor Department projections, the Finger Lakes region will add thousands of health care jobs by 2016; other occupations expected to see the most growth over the next seven years include software engineers, customer service representatives, computer systems analysts, bill and account collectors, accountants and food service workers.

Even in the current recession, some industries are largely recession-proof, including health care, education, security and alternative energy, according to

an analysis by Tammy Marino, associate economist with the state Labor Department.

But there is no such thing as a bulletproof job.

“No one is going to be invulnerable to job loss,” said John Challenger, chief executive officer of executive outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas. “Nobody can find a lifetime job at one company anymore.”

Employers currently are in the driver’s seat in terms of hiring. Temp agency Manpower, in a survey earlier this year of employers globally, found that 19 percent of U.S. companies were having difficulty in filling openings, compared with 24 percent in Canada and 44 percent in Mexico. Before the recession, in 2006 and 2007, roughly 40 percent of surveyed U.S. companies were having such difficulties.

The most in-demand jobs, according to the Manpower survey of more than 2,000 U.S. businesses, were engineers, nurses, skilled trades workers, sales reps, drivers and machinists.

For upstate New York, the major drivers of job growth in the future will be services, particularly health, due to the steadily aging population, said Matthew Freedman, assistant professor at Cornell University’s School of Industrial and Labor Relations.

And people with cutting-edge technology skills always will be in demand, especially as the U.S. economy shifts from manufacturing to information technology and services, Freedman said. People with backgrounds in “green” technologies also are going to benefit from government support and increasing market demand for alternative energies, he said.

However, he added, “The jobs that are in demand now, in five years from now, aren’t necessarily the jobs in demand 20 years from now.”

Which is why workers have to focus on job skills instead of particular occupations, said Constance Felder, deputy director of RochesterWorks Inc., the nonprofit employment agency.

“You really are responsible now for managing your career path and making sure you have the skills employers are looking for,” Felder said.

At the base level, those skills include interpersonal communication, math and reading comprehension, at least a high school diploma, some basic computer literacy and personal competencies like coming to work daily and being dependable, said RochesterWorks career services adviser Hannah Morgan.

In the long term, people suited for international jobs — such as having foreign language skills — will be better positioned in the work force, Challenger said. “The more you have skills every business needs, you make yourself more insulated from ups and downs,” he said.

Job safety also can depend very much on location. While Rochester is saturated with engineers currently, the job is in high demand in other parts of the country, Morgan said.

And not every in-demand profession will stay that way. Outsourcing at the professional level, such as medical diagnostics and accounting, is an ongoing trend in business, Felder said.

Between January 2008 and January 2009, the Rochester region lost close to 5,000 manufacturing and trade jobs, according to state Labor Department figures. During the same span, it added close to 3,000 education and health services jobs.

And the half-joking truism about “it’s not what you know but who you know” that helps you land a job is becoming less of a joke as social networking technology makes landing a job easier, Felder said.

“That’s how things are going to happen even more in the future,” she said.

Miller did a number of co-ops at Paychex while a computer science student at Rochester Institute of Technology and was offered a full-time job there before he graduated. And he said he had three other job offers as well. Three years later, the job market in IT is somewhat tighter, he said, with some area companies having rescinded job offers they made to his friends.

Davis, 30, of Greece, started at Verizon Wireless in early 2007 after being laid off months earlier from Xerox Corp. Since then, he’s gone from customer service to tech support to quality assurance, starting a job last month as a supervisor.

“Anybody can do this,” he said. “You just have to be focused and make sure you learn as much as you can learn.

“I was unemployed two years ago, now I’m a supervisor. That speaks for itself.”

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WHERE THE JOBS ARE(N'T)

The least-safe jobs locally? The Rochester area lost more than 7,500 chemical manufacturing jobs and 2,200 transportation equipment and machinery manufacturing jobs between 2005 and 2008, according to Labor Department figures. Manufacturing employment overall is expected to continue shedding workers through 2016.

Resources

For more information on jobs and job hunting, go to:

- RochesterWorks Inc.: www.rochesterworks.org.
 - New York Labor Department: www.labor.state.ny.us.
 - For job listings: www.monster.com.
 - U.S. Labor Department’s Occupational Outlook Handbook: www.bls.gov/OCO.
 - For job hunting resources: www.job-hunt.org/.
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Christopher Davis of Greece was unemployed two years ago. He has found as much job security as there is these days with his position in quality assurance at Verizon Wireless.

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