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Where the Jobs Are, Spring 2009

by Tara Weiss and Emily Schmitt

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A quarterly survey reveals the cities expecting the largest employment growth--and losses--across the country.

Thanks to last year's strong harvest of apples and the jobs that followed in juicing, packaging and shipping, Yakima, Wash., has the strongest employment outlook in the country for the second quarter of 2009, according to a quarterly survey by employment services firm Manpower.

"This is an agricultural base, a huge apple-growing region," says Bill Cook, director of community and economic development for Yakima. "Last year's apple harvest was huge, and it helped carry employment through the winter. Even in a normal economic year that wouldn't happen."

Cities in the Pacific Northwest and Texas have the best employment outlook for April through June, while cities in the Southeast have the weakest, according to the study.

Manpower's Employment Outlook Survey is conducted quarterly to measure employers' intentions of increasing or decreasing their numbers

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of employees. Each employer was asked: "How do you anticipate total employment at your location to change in the three months to the end of June 2009 compared with the current quarter?" The answer is the net employment outlook--the difference between employers who plan to increase and those who plan to decrease.

Of the 31,800 public and private sector employers surveyed in 201 metropolitan areas throughout the U.S., 15% anticipated increases in hiring, 14% said they'd likely decrease staff, and 67% foresaw no change.

Five Florida cities came in among the 10 weakest metropolitan areas for employment outlook. That's largely because of the downturn in the construction industry there, combined with the slowdown in tourism.

"Hospitality was hit hard," says Michael Doyle, vice president and general manager of Manpower's Southeast region. "People aren't traveling to Florida, and all the service industries, like hotels, rental cars and restaurants, are affected. Everything gets hit when fewer people come to visit."

Meanwhile, Anchorage, Alaska, has the third-strongest employment outlook, thanks to a strong showing in health care. That sector has added nearly 2,700 jobs since 2003 and employs close to 15,000 people. Also, Target just opened in Anchorage, and the town will soon get its first Walgreens and Kohl's.

Among industries nationwide, leisure and hospitality is expected to add the most positions. Across the country, employers expect a 14% net employment gain in the sector, but not because Americans are going on vacation. Rather, they are dining at inexpensive restaurants like McDonald's, Chili's and the Olive Garden, which will all have to beef up their staffs.

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Business services--accountants and lawyers--also expect to see a boost in hiring in the next quarter, with a +9% net employment outlook. Also in that group are data processors, thanks largely to President Obama's push to get health care records digitized.

Manufacturing of durable goods will take the hardest hit, particularly in the Southeast. "The bulk of what the South is known for is manufacturing, and that's on a decline because of emerging markets and because of the general lack of need," says Doyle. "That's the whole theme in the South."

In Pictures: Best Cities for New Jobs This Spring



Courtesy of Washington State Tourism

1. Yakima, Wash.
Net employment outlook: +21%

Yakima is known for its abundance of apple varieties, and last year's harvest boosted employment. Packing and juice companies that revolve around the apple orchards helped carry that employment through the winter, something

that wouldn't happen in a more ordinary year. Yakima also grows hops for beer and ships them around the world.

2. Kennewick, Wash.
Net employment outlook: +19%

Once home to the nation's most Ph.D.'s per capita, Kennewick has an impressive number of engineers and scientists. Pacific Northwest National Lab employs many of them to convert agricultural materials into plastics and biofuels and perform research involving fuel cells. The region's farmland also provides jobs, with workers growing potatoes, corn, asparagus and wheat.

3. Anchorage, Alaska
Net employment outlook: +18%

A high-growth area in Anchorage this year is health care, which has added nearly 2,700

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jobs since 2003 and employs close to 15,000 people. Retail is also booming, and although it may seem strange to those in the rest of the country, Anchorage just added its first Target and is soon to get its first Walgreens and Kohl's.

4. Amarillo, Texas

Net employment outlook: +15%

Pantex is one of Amarillo's largest employers, with more than 3,000 workers refurbishing nuclear warheads--the only place in the world where it's done. Beyond that, medical services and food processing are big. The Harrington Medical Center employs 8,000 to 10,000 people, and Blue Cross and Nationwide Insurance are also a presence. California-based Hilmar Cheese recently opened a plant in Amarillo.

5. Sioux Falls, S.D.

Net employment outlook: +14%

Despite recent economic news, financial services are flourishing in Sioux Falls. Citigroup built its headquarters there, and Wells Fargo, HSBC and Premier Bankcard employ close to 3,000 people. In addition to the banks, Avera Health and Sanford employ more than 10,000 people.

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In Pictures: Worst Cities For New Jobs This Spring



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1. Cape Coral--Ft. Myers, Fla.

Net employment outlook: -16%

The entire state of Florida has taken a hit from the crumbling of its construction and real estate industries. Florida and Arizona were among the first states struck by the housing slump, and they have yet to recover. The state's hospitality industry

has also been hit hard since fewer people are taking vacations.

2. San Juan, Puerto Rico

Net employment outlook: -16%

Manufacturing has taken a beating here. Not too long ago Puerto Rico was considered an emerging market for manufacturing since the cost of doing business was inexpensive. Large companies built plants because it was cheaper than in the States. Now Vietnam and the Dominican Republic are cheaper, and manufactures are sending their business there.

3. Port St. Lucie, Fla.

Net employment outlook: -14%

Like so many areas in Florida, Port St. Lucie was hit by the one-two punch of drops in both the hospitality industry and construction.

4. Miami--Fort Lauderdale--Pompano Beach, Fla.

Net employment outlook: -14%

In addition to leisure, hospitality and construction, professional and financial services in this stretch of southeastern Florida have also suffered.

5. Santa Barbara--Santa Maria--Goleta, Calif.

Net employment outlook: -11%

There has been a significant decline in construction in this part of the country. What's more, there has been a reduction in financial activities, which in these parts means mortgage brokers. While many homeowners elsewhere have been refinancing their mortgages to get lower interest rates, homeowners here haven't, probably because so many owe more than their homes are worth and are in foreclosure. Another weak area is durable-goods manufacturing, which was a core industry here and has taken a hit too.

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