

Job recruiters see signs of improvement in Sacramento area

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Cautious optimism is the catchphrase for Sacramento-area employers and recruiters in early 2011.

There's a brighter mood in hiring offices, employers are saying. Recruiters say companies that survived the bad times that brought hiring to a standstill in 2010 are ready to break the logjam in 2011.

"It feels totally different now around here," said Curt Cetraro, chief executive officer of ConnectPoint Search Group, a Sacramento-based recruiting firm. "Business is very busy right now. "We're seeing needs in accounting, IT, lower-level clerk positions. A good percentage are new positions. That was not the case last year."

Among the top needs in 2011: [health care workers](#) to tend to a graying Sacramento and information technology professionals, especially those adept at software engineering and programming and steeped in security to keep data and networks safe.

That echoes what Dion Lim, chief executive officer of Mountain View-based SimplyHired.com, is seeing.

"We've seen an increase across a wide swath of industries," Lim said. "Tech is an evergreen industry in the midst of recessionary forces. Tech can create new opportunities that spawn new jobs."

At KlickNation, a Sacramento firm that designs and builds games for social networks like Facebook, the needs are across the board: [software engineers](#), game designers, graphic artists.

Starting in tiny offices with a staff of 10 near Fremont Park just two years ago, KlickNation CEO Mark Otero now leads a staff of 50 in a larger midtown space and is gearing for the launch of two new games in coming weeks – and a new round of hires.

"Our two games support about 50 people. If these new games do as we hope, we'll double the staff," Otero said.

He'll look closely at software engineers. Otero recruits from around the country, but fills many of his positions with homegrown talent.

"Sacramento is definitely underrated. Sacramento is a fertile ground for engineers," he said. "They aren't necessarily exposed to newer technologies, but a good engineer can learn those things. I don't see it as a deterrent."

Trofholtz Technologies Inc., a Rocklin-based firm that develops electronic [security systems](#) for federal agencies, also plans to hire later this year after winning a portion of a \$250 million [security systems](#) contract from the [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers](#).

"This is going to bring us a lot of opportunity," said Yvonne Glenn, president and chief executive officer.

The \$23 million company, which grew from 96 employees to 124 in 2010, has plans to add dozens more applications developers and other workers in the second half of the year.

Demand for [health care workers](#) in Sacramento improved in the final months of 2010, according to San Francisco-based health care employment analysts Health Workforce Solutions, and the prognosis is good for 2011.

Local construction and expansion plans by the [Veterans Administration](#) and a \$10.8 million surgery center by Sutter Health in Elk Grove are among the projects that show health care's growth.

That growth is attracting those who are training for new, stable careers, said Jessica Guido, an admissions adviser at the nonprofit Center for Employment Training in south Sacramento, where medical assistant training is a hot commodity.

"It's a reassuring field – there's bigger opportunity," Guido said. "They're looking for training where there's room for growth."

There also are positive signs in accounting, administration and in manufacturing tied to the green economy, recruiters said.

One highlight is Siemens Mobility's plans announced late last year for about 200 new jobs as part of a \$466 million contract to build clean-running electric locomotives to modernize Amtrak's aging East Coast rail fleet.

And San Mateo-based solar power firm Solar City plans to fill 25 positions including electricians and installers at its newly expanded Sacramento facility. The company, which had 13 workers at the site in early 2010, now has 75 and has more than doubled the size of the facility to 15,000 square feet.

"It's a good sign – we're growing solar jobs," said spokeswoman Nina Oestlian.

Job search sites like Jobvite.com and SimplyHired.com show marked jumps in Sacramento-area postings, with most of the new activity focused on health care and information technology positions.

"Sacramento is such a tough-hit area, but we've seen a year-over-year increase in job openings," said Dion Lim, chief executive officer, SimplyHired.com. "It's a good message."

At Dice.com, employers have posted nearly 470 Sacramento-area openings – an increase of nearly a third from the same time a year ago.

Despite the encouraging signs, Sacramento's job climate remains harsh.

In all, 131,000 workers in the four-county Sacramento area were out of work in December, a jobless rate of 12.5 percent, according to the state Employment Development Department.

"There are pockets out there, but the landscape is very challenging," said [Amelya Stevenson](#), president of the Sacramento Area Human Resource Association and human resources consulting firm [e-VentExe](#). "People are saying that things can't get worse, but we're taking it one day at a time and I think that's what companies are doing."

Even when jobs are found, they don't always replace the income from lost jobs, particularly for older workers.

"We're seeing people working today at wages that are less than they used to make," said Dan Finnegan, CEO of Jobvite.com. "It's hard for the baby boomer. As a whole, they're not hard-hit by [unemployment](#), but they are hard-hit with underemployment."

Some recession-driven changes in the job market will hang on stubbornly. For instance, the practice of businesses hiring temporary, contract workers may slow this year, but it will continue.

"People are still nervous" about adding permanent staff, said Jess Bushey, marketing director for the Sacramento office of employment agency Roth Staffing.

And overall, Sacramento remains one of the most difficult metro areas in the nation in which to find work, reports job search engine Juju.com's Job Search Difficulty Index.

More than five Sacramento-area workers are unemployed for every job posted online, according to the index, which is calculated by dividing the number of unemployed workers in an area by the website's job postings.

Only [Los Angeles](#), Riverside, [Las Vegas](#), Detroit and Miami have a higher number of job seekers per ad than Sacramento.

"From my perspective, it's still tough out there," Cetraro of ConnectPoint said. "There's still too many good people unemployed."

Gathering information for friends at an employment fair at the Sacramento Convention Center on Monday, Jerome Chapel said he sees that up close.

"I know too many people out of work. My daughter has a part-time job, but that's down to one day a week," Chapel said. "The opportunities that are available aren't available for everyone. I have a degree, but it would be hard to find a job if I didn't. It's rough out there."

Chapel's right, said Jobvite.com's Finnegan.

"People with a college education will have greater opportunities. The unemployment rate for those without a college degree is four times higher than for those who do," said Finnegan.

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