



Excerpts from: Wisconsin Businesses Grapple With a Growing Worker Shortage

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by Matthew DeFour

A Pulaski yacht manufacturer that cut 1,000 positions during the Great Recession now strains to fill 70 openings. In Neenah, a business consulting company replaces print shop workers with tech-savvy programmers, some of them working remotely in other states. At a Lancaster dairy farm a robot milks the cows 24 hours a day. A Madison restaurant has raised pay for entry-level chefs in recent years more than 50 percent to \$14 an hour, but still closes on Sunday evenings — not because of a lack of customers, but because workers are scarce.

Those and countless other stories across Wisconsin are symptoms of a growing worker shortage that is expected to worsen over the next decade. Employers from a broad range of industries are reporting difficulty finding workers — and not only for skilled professionals such as nurses, welders and computer programmers, who require a strong education and training system, but also for workers with a high school diploma and some additional training at restaurants, farms, construction sites, factories, senior care facilities, retailers and other businesses.

In June [2017] the federal government reported a record 6.1 million U.S. job openings, including 1.5 million in the Midwest. Based on Wisconsin's share of the Midwest workforce, that suggests some 134,000 job openings in Wisconsin.

For the past two years job openings have consistently outpaced new hires, a phenomenon not seen during the last period of low unemployment a decade ago, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. That could be the result of a general lack of applicants, a lack of skilled applicants or applicants not accepting job offers.

There are a multitude of factors contributing to the worker shortage in Wisconsin and across the country starting with historically low unemployment and the aging population, said Harry Holzer, a Georgetown University public policy professor and former chief economist at the U.S. Department of Labor.

Wisconsin's 3.2 percent unemployment rate in July [2017] is near a record low and down from a peak of 9.2 percent in January 2010. That's well below what economists consider to be "full employment" — the level at which everyone who is willing and able to work is employed, or about 4 or 5 percent.

Wisconsin also has an aging workforce. Between 2010 and 2025, the 65-and-older population is expected to have increased by two-thirds, while the working-age population is expected to remain flat. By 2023, 65-year-olds are projected to outnumber 18-year-olds for the first time.

Work Cited:

https://madison.com/ws/business/wisconsin-businesses-grapple-with-a-growing-worker-shortage/article_3ef1000e-c18b-5f72-bbcd-720ee2456111.html

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