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## Where the jobs are

Even in a deteriorating economy, some area businesses are hiring

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Tosha Williams never gave up hope.

Laid off in August from her job at Tata Business Support Services in Milton, she found herself out of work just as local employment opportunities started free falling.

With each passing month, the former quality coach with Tata watched as the Pensacola Bay Area's jobless numbers climbed; from 6.2 percent in October to a stunning 9.1 percent in January.

"It was very difficult looking for work," the 26-year-old Williams said. "I really didn't see any jobs available."

Neither did Derek Wallace, who lost his job with an air-filtration company late last summer and spent nearly six months looking for work.

"It was tough," he said. "It was basically take what you could find because there just weren't that many jobs."

Williams clung to the optimism that Tata would recall her once the company's business improved.

That day came in February when Tata landed a large, online customer service contract with a major national travel company that triggered a new wave of hiring.

Williams was recalled to her former job, and Wallace, 25, was hired as a customer service representative.

They are among the lucky ones to find work in a demanding job market that's getting tighter by the week.

In spite of the grim unemployment numbers, there are jobs available, according to Workforce Escarosa spokesman Tom Owsley.

"There are jobs out there. We have more than 200 jobs listed on our Web site, but many of them require a unique set of skills," he continued. "And that's always been a problem, finding those unique jobseekers to match with the right job."

Many local companies like Tata, West Telemarketing, Navy Federal Credit Union and local hospitals and health care providers — are hiring he said.

Owsley said he is seeing an increase in the number of job openings in the field of health care, social services, warehousing, secretarial and office administration, and custodial and cleaning service

companies.

## Hospitals hiring

Denise McLeod with Pensacola-based Landrum Staffing Services also sees a few bright spots in the local job market.

One is in the mortgage-lending business where she's seeing an uptick in the number of jobs available.

Another is the steady strength in the health care sectors: Most hospitals are hiring.

About a fifth of all jobs Landrum posts for any given week are connected to the medical community, she said.

West Florida Hospital is among those local health care providers hiring as a result of a significant increase in the number of patients over the past two months.

"We are hiring and have 56 key positions open," he said. "They're mostly in our nursing and Intensive Care Units."

Sacred Heart Health System spokesman Mike Burke said despite a much lower turnover rate of employees, the hospital is hiring.

"What we're seeing is that people are more reluctant to leave their jobs," Burke said. "They are holding on to them longer because there are few jobs available in the health care community. But we are still hiring people."

Baptist Hospital also is hiring, recruiting for 130 open positions that focus on direct patient care and client services, according to spokeswoman Colleen Kirsch.

"Baptist Health Care is not on a hiring freeze and maintains a positive outlook, despite a weak economy," she said.

Among the more-robust hiring sectors in the Pensacola Bay Area are telemarketers, including West Telemarketing's operation in the Marcus Point area.

## Looking for recruits

West spokesman Michael Ward said the company is ramping up to hire about 120 people to help service a new contract with one of the nation's larger cable corporations.

"We're looking for friendly problem-solvers who are computer-literate and who can pass drug tests and background checks," said Ward. "We're looking for recruits from all walks of life. We have 18-year-olds working for us, and we have an 84-year-old employee with a Ph.D."

Ward said new employees are offered benefits after a 90-day probationary period and most start at \$11.50 an hour.

"We do like to see applicants with a history of work stability, those who have worked for a previous employer for at least a year," he noted.

Tata Business Support Services says its hiring initiatives will continue through this spring.

Tata Vice President Ricardo Layun said they are looking to hire more than 100 workers at their Milton operation, pushing that company's total workforce eventually to more than 220.

"It's great to be able to say that we're in a growth mode, and contributing jobs and bringing spending power of our employees to Escambia and Santa Rosa counties," said Layun.

One local company that's had a huge impact on employment figures is Navy Federal.

The Virginia-based company, the largest credit union in the world, recently completed a major expansion of its of Pensacola operation.

Navy Federal CEO Cutler Dawson said the company is looking for at least 43 new employees to add to the more than 1,200 currently working for the company at its sprawling Beulah campus.

## 'Talented people'

Dawson said he expects the new jobs to be filled by the end of March, and be added to the 17 employees hired in January.

"We're proud to be creating new jobs in this time of economic uncertainty," Dawson said.

"The greater Pensacola area has a robust pool of talented people whose skill sets and productivity are unmatched."

## Additional Facts

Losing manufacturing jobs

Where Workforce Escarosa's Tom Owsley sees a sharp contraction in jobs is in heavy industry and production.

Recent layoffs at Solutia's nylon-manufacturing plant north of Pensacola, and the closing of Wayne Dalton's local garage-door manufacturing plant has cut jobs in the industrial sector by nearly 1,000.

And the number of job orders from local companies has seen a precipitous drop in recent weeks in the wake of bad economic news, said Denise McLeod with Pensacola-based Landrum Staffing Services.

"Six months ago we typically would have 90 to 120 open job orders at the beginning of each week," McLeod said. "Last week we had 27. Not in the past several years have I seen it drop off and stay as low as it has been this past couple of weeks."

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