

Prospects for Jobs Finally Improve

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To accurately assess the local employment scene is to take in unique factors. Elsewhere, when recessions hit home, people tend to leave in search of employment. Not the case here. Instead of leaving in droves, many new residents poured in from out of state. Oregon's recession also lasted longer than the national one, beginning in December 2000 and ending in June 2003.

The last time the state was economically strong in 1996, Oregon was creating tens of thousands of jobs and offsetting the impact from new residents. During the past five years, population growth slowed a bit, but the recession limited new jobs and unemployment jumped.

"Oregon has always had a faster growth rate than the United States as a whole," said Christian Kaylor, workforce analyst for the state Employment Department. "It's been a challenge for a number of years, but we've always done well. People want to live here and our economy is resilient."

The city's racially and economically diverse neighborhoods have unique challenges within Portland's economy. Many have been hit harder than the state as a whole, but at the same time there has been new development and a dramatic demographical change.

On a Monday morning last week, Metro One Stop career center, at Northeast 42nd and Killingsworth, steadily filled up with job seekers using computers to search for job openings and work on their resumes. Others found job openings from large employers posted on the wall.

The Portland Metropolitan Workforce Training Center, a service of Worksystems, Inc. operates two north and northeast career centers, the Metro One Stop office on Killingsworth, and Goal Post, located in



PHOTO BY ISAAH BOUIE/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Belinda Russell, a laborer for Lease, Crutcher and Lewis Construction Co., directs traffic away from work on a new building at Portland State University. Steady employment in construction when there is usually a decline this time of year is an indication of an improving local economy.

St. Johns.

Considering the number of people in the center, one might assume jobs are still scarce, but according to Sue Fletcher, communications manager for WSI, people aren't merely looking for work, they're upgrading and seeking new careers.

Fletcher said when the economy was awful people took whatever jobs were available. Now there's more competition in the workforce and people are looking for better training.

Abdul Majidi, Metro One Stop manager, agrees. His agency has seen more employers hiring, but only a slight decrease in the number of people through its doors because of all the job seekers wanting new skills to keep up with the improving labor environment.

"We're working hard because people deserve better," he said, "and it is getting better."

Portland's Hispanic population also factors into the inner city's changing employment landscape. Hispanics make up Oregon's fastest growing community; growing by 275 percent in 2000 alone. Now 13 percent of Oregonians are Hispanic, making up 10 percent of the workforce in 2003.

Amidst the latest optimistic figures in employment brings a warning for January and its inevitable decline of 18,000 to 24,000 jobs across all industries, officials said. Also, the unemployment rate isn't a comprehensive picture of everyone out of work. It's a calculation of people actively looking for work, excluding those who haven't looked for work in the past year and discouraged workers who believe there is not a job available for them.

State figures show there were 392,000 discouraged workers in October. Kaylor said some economists feel if marginally attached and discouraged workers were counted, the unemployment rate would be one full percent higher.

All Girls and All Boys Schools Eyed

Public to hear proposals Thursday

School Superintendent Vicki Phillips plans on presenting recommendations to redesign the so-called Jefferson Cluster, the local schools feeding into Jefferson High School in north and northeast Portland, during a public meeting on Thursday at 6:30 p.m. at Atkeley

Green School, 6031 N. Montana Ave.

One of the options considered by a community committee is for an all-boys school for grades 7-12 at Jefferson and an all-girls program for grades 7-12 at Harriet Tubman Middle School. Other options will be presented to the community at Thursday's meeting.

Phillips has not made her decision on any recommendations, school officials say. She had planned to go to the School Board

on Monday, but the agenda item was postponed until Jan. 9 to give the community a chance to hear the proposal and comment on them. Board members will also be attending Thursday's meeting. Earlier proposals to add seventh and eighth grades at Jefferson drew opposition, mainly over concerns about mixing older boys and girls with younger boys and girls.

School District's spokesperson Brenda Gustafson says, "Nothing is official or finalized yet."



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Harriet Tubman Middle School in north Portland could become an all-girls junior and senior high school. It's just one of several proposals going to the community in a public meeting on Thursday.

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