



The Republican.

Skilled workers sought in WMass

Sunday, February 10, 2008

By **GEORGE GRAHAM**
ggraham@repub.com

SPRINGFIELD - Jobs within the health care sector, the increasingly high-tech world of precision manufacturing, and in retail have promising futures in Western Massachusetts.

"In general, they are jobs that require more skills, not less," said William J. Ward, executive director of the Regional Employment Board of Hampden County.

Ward added, however, that he doesn't see any major near-term shifts in the job market for Western Massachusetts.

The \$239.3 million expansion of Baystate Medical Center will create thousands of new health care jobs over the next 10 years, Ward said.

The state approved the application for the project, which includes a seven-story addition to the existing Baystate Medical Center, in November.

Meanwhile, the demand for medical technicians is increasing in such areas as sonography and especially imaging.

"The specialty niches is where you will find increased growth in health care," Ward said.

The Pioneer Valley's need for dental assistants and registered nurses will also grow, Ward said.

The 3.7 percent vacancy rate for registered nurses in the Pioneer Valley exceeds the statewide average of 3.2 to 3.3 percent, Ward said.

"We have got to find a way to solve that problem and create more RNs," Ward said. "Demand for that field will continue into the near and distant future with the aging of the population.

At the lower end of the health care sector, demand will also grow for certified nursing assistants.

"These jobs tend to turn over at a higher rate than other jobs, and therefore there are a number of openings in the field as they either leave or move up," Ward said.

Certain niche occupations in the precision manufacturing field, especially in the highly skilled area of computer numerical control, will also grow.

"Everyone writes manufacturing off," Westfield Community Development Director James M. Boardman said. "But precision manufacturing is very hot, ranging from the 'Mom and Pops' to the large ones that employ a couple of hundred."

Boardman said there is a big cluster of such operations in Westfield, and in general, Western Massachusetts.

"There are way more job openings than people to fill them," Boardman said of the high tech precision manufacturing jobs.

Retail also looks promising, in part because national retailers seem to share the perception that this corner of the world is underserved, Boardman said.

That perception is underscored in Westfield with the proposed Westfield Pavilion project that would create the largest open air shopping center in the region.

Boardman and other Westfield officials have said that national and regional retailers have expressed significant interest in the 812,900-square-foot project that would be built near Barnes Municipal Airport.

The project, which would offer about half the retail space of the Holyoke Mall at Ingleside, would include a restaurant, a cinema and 4,700 parking spaces.

Boardman said he hopes to see ground-breaking for the National Realty and Development project later this year.

"Everyone is gloom and doom about the economy, but the retail people still have the pedal to the metal," Boardman said.

Ward said jobs will also likely remain available in such professional business services as accounting and personnel, and call center customer service-type jobs.

Such jobs call for skilled and licensed employees.

"Certainly a company like MassMutual continues to have a need for skills in this arena," Ward said.

Construction-related jobs, meanwhile, are a bit of an unknown, Ward said.

"There is not a lot of new construction," he said. "It has really slowed down."

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