

Jobs outlook for 2015: positive

By Ethan Forman

You might be surprised to learn machinists are in high demand north of Boston, or that “bilingual” is the top skill mentioned in online job postings in Essex County.

One thing is for sure, people found jobs in 2014. The unemployment rate dropped from 6.5 percent to 5.6 percent from September 2013 to September 2014 in the Haverhill, North Andover and Amesbury area, according to state Department of Unemployment Assistance data.

In the Lawrence, Methuen and Salem, New Hampshire, region, the unemployment rate fell

from 11.5 percent to 9.3 percent during the same time period.

In Peabody, Lynn, Marblehead, Nahant, Salem and Swampscott, the unemployment rate dropped from 7.1 percent in September 2013 to 6.3 percent in September 2014.

Critical industries

The critical areas of the economy where hiring might take place are health care, durable goods manufacturing, construction and finance and insurance, according to the Salem, Mass.-based North Shore Workforce Investment Board. ➤

These sectors are considered critical because more than 5,000 people are employed in each of them and they carry career paths that lead to high-wage jobs. The average wage in manufacturing, for example, is about \$90,000 a year, said Mary

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Sarris, the executive director of the North Shore Workforce Investment Board.

From 2004 to 2013, durable goods manufacturing on the North Shore declined by 19.29 percent and construction dropped 5 percent. Still, Sarris said, these are critical industries for the North Shore, and hiring in them may be turning around. Statewide, construction jobs saw an uptick in October of 1.1 percent while manufacturing declined by a modest 0.2 percent, according to the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development.

“We know that it’s not an industry we want to let go,” Sarris said of manufacturing.

On the North Shore, health care jobs shot up by almost 36 percent from 2004 to 2013. Over the course of 2014, education and health services have gained 16,000 jobs in the Bay State,



Photo by KEN YUSZKUS

Mary Sarris, executive director of the North Shore Workforce Investment Board, says hiring in manufacturing and construction jobs may be on the upswing. Will Sinatra is the manager of market research.

the state said. Health care is the only sector that continues to show consistent job growth, Sarris said.

Finance and insurance jobs declined 2.82 percent from 2004 to 2013 on the North Shore, but over the course of 2014, financial activities added 1,900 jobs.

Hot jobs for 2015

The top hard job skill listed in online job postings is “bilingual,” with 932 postings from July 22 to Nov. 19, according to information provided by Will Sinatra, the manager of market research at the North Shore Workforce Investment Board.

The next top job skills in demand include “quality assurance” and “structured query language,” followed by “technical support,” “quality control,” “bilingual Spanish,” “customer relationship management” and “software development.”

In Essex County, the top 10 employer online job postings from July to November came from health benefits company WellPoint (now Anthem), Philips, Lahey Clinic, NSM (an insurance company), Sears, Eliot Community Human Services, Macy’s, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Raytheon and Whole Foods.

The top online job posting for someone with a high-school diploma was for “retail salesperson.” Those with bachelor’s degrees will see job postings for registered nurses and computers. Those with master’s degrees and above can expect to see postings for mental health and substance abuse

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social workers, followed by social and human service assistance, and marketing managers.

Jobs North Shore

"One thing I've been seeing with general job trends is, there has been a basic rise in the foundation skills for people," Sinatra said. "Technological skills are increasing, so people need to know how to use computers as a professional tool. You need to know how to use the Internet as a professional tool. Microsoft Office is a basic skill now."

Sarris said high-skilled manufacturing jobs are in demand, for machinists and CNC (computer numerical control) operators. Companies seeking workers with advanced manufacturing skills include medical device makers such as Analogic of Peabody, Medtronic and Abiomed both of Danvers, and Microline Surgical of Beverly.

"They are all looking for skill manufacturing employees," Sarris said. "And so, the message is to get out to the world is young people should seriously consider ... STEM careers," using the acronym for science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

"I get calls all the time from companies looking for machinists and CNC operators," Sarris said. "A lot of it is because the pipeline dried up, people stopped going into those fields because there was a certain amount of decline in manufacturing, which you can see on the charts, and because no

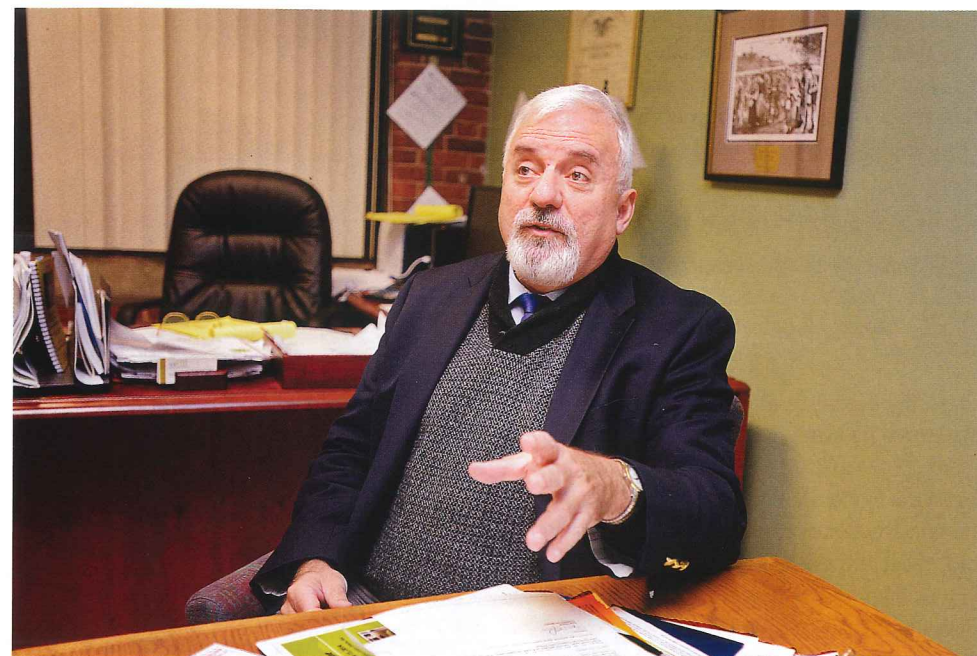


Photo by RYAN HUTTON

Rafael Abislaiman, executive director of the Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board, says the Northeast benefits from an educated workforce.

one was going into the pipeline, the average age of people in that industry has increased."

Both construction and manufacturing had been hard hit by the recession, as both are sensitive to economic change.

"They are also the two industries that take the

longest to come back," Sinatra said. He expects construction and trades to be growing sectors in 2015.

"Because of the amount of construction going on, it's going to last through the next year," Sinatra said.

In health care, nurse practitioner, physicians assistant and community health workers are in demand, due to changes driven by cost containment legislation in health care, Sarris said. Physical, occupational and speech therapists, certified nurse aides and social workers are in demand.

One job that may be going the way of the dinosaur because of computers and technology is the administrative assistant.

Marketing manager and social media analyst are new hot jobs given the need to analyze data captured by websites, such as online buying sites that track your consumer habits. Marketing managers help those in promotions and advertising understand their audience, Sinatra said.

Jobs in the Merrimack Valley

Executive Director of the Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board Rafael Abislaiman said the Northeast benefits from an educated workforce "and they are major parts of the innovation economy we are getting into."

Not all the jobs being created in the region are good-paying jobs for those well-educated workers with advanced degrees, however.

"The difficulty is we also have a growing population of service people and most of the service jobs are low-income jobs," Abislaiman said. "That's where the highest job creation growth

has been, not only around here, but throughout the country."

That includes jobs in retail, fast-food and other service jobs, he said.

are going to be treated in a way that is decent and equitable," he said.

Abislaiman said he sees improvement in the jobs picture from the high-tech sector. Raytheon

"We are in better shape than most parts of the country because of our connection to the innovation economy, through science and engineering."

Rafael Abislaiman

Executive director of the Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board

"There are a lot, a lot of jobs there, but we are in better shape than most parts of the country because of our connection to the innovation economy, through science and engineering," Abislaiman said. "Other parts of the country will have a much greater percentage of service jobs than we do."

More manufacturing could be brought back to the Merrimack Valley, but automation and other technological advances may not mean a lot of jobs being created.

"We are going to have to find a way as a society to work out how people who don't work because there aren't jobs as a result of automation

has been able to diversify beyond defense, and companies like iRobot in Burlington are tapping into a new market for the home use of simple robotic devices.

Medical devices and bioengineering are also sectors to watch, with the University of Massachusetts Lowell driving innovation in the region. The university's emphasis on STEM jobs gives its students a leg up on landing high-wage jobs being created in today's economy.

"Those types of innovative things based on high education is going to probably make us competitive for the foreseeable future," Abislaiman said. **NOR**

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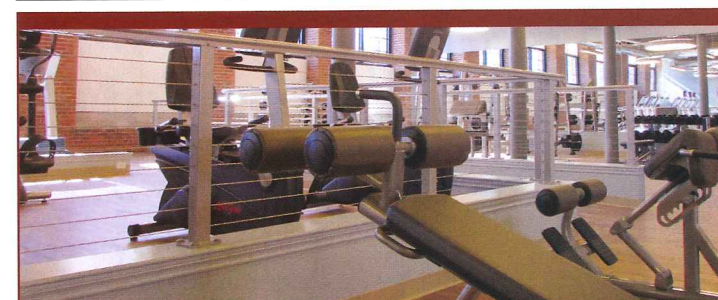
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