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Cry for help goes out from the hiring community

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

The signs are everywhere and no matter how they say it, they might as well add an exclamation point: "Help Wanted!"

Faced with competition from government incentives that are keeping applicants from the door, Southwestern Illinois employers are at a crisis point in filling openings, just as they try to regain footing from a pandemic that broke up the workforce worse than anything in memory.

"I have never seen it like this before," said Marc Voegelé, owner of Express Employment Professionals. "Drive around any town in Metro East and you're going to see 'Now Hiring' signs. And I guarantee you the number of businesses hiring are more than the number posting signs out there."

Express Employment is a staffing agency that fills positions in Metro East, working through offices in Glen Carbon and Fairview Heights. Voegelé's firm deals with companies that specialize in manufacturing, distribution, retail, light industrial, construction, trucking, accounting and others. He's been able to track local employment patterns the past 15 years.

Tony Fuhrmann, director of Madison County Employment & Training, another longtime observer of the workforce, sees four reasons why workers are hard to come by.

- Some are longtime employees who were laid off and still think they'll get

called back to their original employer.

- There is an ever-shrinking group that is still concerned about being out in public because of coronavirus.

- Some are parents affected by their children's at-home, remote schooling needs.

- There is a "disincentive" for returning to work, provided by the stimulus, unemployment, and health insurance provided under the American Rescue Plan Act.

Employers are pulling out the stops with hiring fairs, parking lot interviews, fliers in shopping bags, notes on pizza delivery boxes, referral fees, free meals, drawings, bonuses for recruitments, free TVS — sometimes to little avail. Simply getting people to apply isn't enough. Many people are being hired on the spot.

"I just saw a posting from a well-known local restaurant, and she said she has to schedule 16 interviews to get one to show up," Voegelé said. "That's unheard of."

The most recent stimulus bill, passed under the Biden administration, could be stifling things more than they were under the stimulus packages of 2020.

"Last year we had a \$600 stimulus came out and it took people out of the labor pool for four to six weeks. This time we're looking at a stimulus check that's more than double that at \$1,400 for individuals (making up to \$75,000 annually)," Voegelé said.

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A flag highlights a hiring sign at the McDonald's Restaurant on Troy Road in Edwardsville. IBJ photo

Business disputes may take years, but owners can be ready for them

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

The notice comes in the mail or delivered by a deputy: You've been served with a lawsuit.

Nothing ices a business person's veins quite like being dragged into court to defend one's honor, one's company and perhaps the fate of a whole team of employees.

Southwestern Illinois has a history of being rife for such litigation, with lawyers eager to present evidence to friendly juries in hopes of a big verdict on behalf of their clients. Most such cases never make it to court, settled by the parties to avoid a drawn-out process. But the result is sometimes a huge expense for the people involved.

Contract disputes, breach of fiduciary duty, partnerships and shareholder disputes all can be subject to court ac-

tion given the right circumstances, said Laura Schrick and Melissa Meirink, both shareholders at Mathis, Marifian and Richter, a Belleville-based law firm. They presented a series of tips to members of the Leadership Council of Southwestern Illinois this past month.

Their presentation did not focus on civil case issues like car wrecks and personal injury that can also bug businesses. Instead, the attorneys focused on business disputes involving daily operational issues, transactions, and documentation.

Locally, such disputes can involve noncompete contracts, trade secrets, vendor disagreements and fraud. They are litigated in state court or in federal court, with some making it to the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals or the 5th District Appellate Court. A chosen few advance to the State Supreme Court.

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Newspapers going postal over slowed mail delivery

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

Among the biggest issues facing Illinois newspaper executives are the issues they print — and relying on the mail to get them to readers on time.

Representatives of state and federal newspaper associations say the U.S. Postal Service's slow handling of delivery in the past year is hitting their circulation bottom line.

Delays at postal distribution centers, partially brought on by employee shortfalls induced by COVID-19, is in turn causing delays in getting papers into customers' hands.

"Everybody's got the same problem. My local postmasters are going out of their way to make things work. It's in the big centers where the problem is," said John

M. Galer, vice chairman of the National Newspaper Association, whose family owns a string of newspapers in Montgomery, Macoupin and Madison counties, including his flagship paper, The Journal News in Hillsboro, Ill.

"Whatever I can delivery myself to post offices myself gets out just fine. The local postmasters do a great job. The issue comes at the sorting centers. Going to St. Louis and coming back out, it can be a week to four weeks before anybody gets their papers. My paper is twice weekly. I had a lady called who got all her February papers the second week of March," Galer said.

As with other publishers interviewed, Galer said the issue mainly affects papers that are delivered outside of his newspaper's core territory.

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Freight Week Preview

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Please initial and pass to the next executive in your department.
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