

## **Job-seeking teens feel brunt of economy**

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By Leigh Strobe

Lazy or picky? Neither. Teenagers complaining that they can't find summer jobs this year are telling the truth.

That was the case in Wichita, Kan., where organizers canceled the annual youth summer job fair because businesses just weren't hiring. Adults had taken all the jobs.

Wichita, like much of the country, has been hammered by the weak economy. The national unemployment rate has hovered near an eight-year high for more than a year now and layoffs haven't eased.

In many communities, adults are snatching the lower-wage, part-time service jobs that teenagers traditionally have relied on for summer employment. In Wichita, with more than 11,000 aviation layoffs since the 2001 terrorist attacks, that's been especially true.

Corrinda Calhoun, 16, who has worked the last two summers, started looking for a job several months ago because she thought her search might take longer this year. She didn't realize just how difficult it would be.

"I was really worried," she said. "I had started looking so early, so I became really concerned. There are certain summer jobs, like amusement parks, fast-food, retail, lifeguarding and stuff like that, that are always out there. But adults were taking them."

Officials expect the job market to worsen for youth as laid-off workers exhaust their unemployment benefits and look for any available work that will pay the bills. In many cases, teens' job opportunities are being taken by their parents.

Corrinda's best friend is in that situation. Her dad was laid off by Cessna Aircraft Co. and now is working at Wal-Mart. She's still looking for a job to help supplement the family's lost income.

It's a nationwide problem, said Renee Ward, founder and executive director of Teens4hire.org, an Internet job service for youth.

"This is Phoenix, this is Dallas, this is Houston, this is St. Louis, this is Oregon," Ward said. "I've got thousands, literally hundreds of thousands of young adults that want to work, and there are no jobs."

A survey by Teens4hire.org found that more than 775 employers that usually hire teenagers, including restaurants, retailers and summer camps, are cutting back on all hires. Many aren't even considering teen applicants this year.

Kevin Coonce, 17, of Arlington, Va., wanted a job at a new bookstore that opened near his house, but it isn't hiring.

He hopes he won't have to resort to a food service job. He worked at Baskin-Robbins two years ago but said he got tired of rude customers. He quit and got a job as a cashier at a pharmacy, but now hopes to do something different.

"People were always complaining -- the floor was sticky, something wasn't right with something they ordered," he said. "You can't really complain about Tylenol because it's in a box."

College graduates looking for their first real job and students who want internships also are having difficulty.

The National Association of Colleges and Employers reported that graduates were getting fewer job offers than those two years ago.

"When I look at the economy as a whole, I think it is rather dismal," said Camille Luckenbaugh, the association's employment information manager. "We definitely want to see times getting better. Certainly some employers have jobs. But they are fewer in number."

Graduates with degrees in business are seeing the highest increases in salary offers, particularly in business administration and accounting. Schools also are reporting that an increasing number of students are looking for unpaid internships, hoping those positions might turn into full-time employment later, Luckenbaugh said.

Just 69.5 percent of youth ages 16 to 24 were in the labor force last July, the lowest rate since 1971, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Government analysts say more youth are enrolling in summer school and choosing not to work. Also, the poor economy in the last few years has caused many frustrated younger job seekers to give up and drop out of the work pool.