

Getting a summer job isn't a given this year

Experts – and your parents – say chances to earn money won't just magically appear

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By VICTOR GODINEZ

High school students may have to look harder and present themselves better than in the past to land a summer job this year, hiring experts say.

Students need to realize that employers that typically do summer hiring – such as mall retailers and amusement parks – may be changing strategies because of the economy, said Renee Ward, founder of Teens4Hire.org.

"Whether they will ramp up to the levels of three years ago is the question," she said. "I venture to say that the answer is no. But they will always need additional help."

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics suggest that young people are having increasing difficulty finding work.

The unemployment rate for workers between the ages of 16 and 24 was 12.4 percent in July 2002. That was up from 10.4 percent in July 2001 and 9.6 percent in July 2000. July is considered the peak of the summer job season.

At the same time, the percentage of eligible youths looking for work has declined, down to 69.5 percent in July 2002 from 72.6 percent in July 1999.

Most – about 27 percent – are looking for retail jobs, followed by food service jobs, a recent Teens4Hire survey found.

Few employers appear to be accelerating seasonal hiring this year. Ms. Ward said that fast-food restaurants, for one, are cutting back.

"Whereas maybe in the past they might have hired five to 10 students per restaurant, this year they might hire two or three," Ms. Ward said.

Adventure Landing in Dallas, which offers miniature golf, go-kart racing and a video game arcade, will add more workers this summer than last now that it's under new management.

"I've already started my hiring process," said guest services manager Woody Atkinson, who has added six or eight workers so far. "By June 1, we want to hire about 30 to 35 more people. Mostly it will be part time, but summer is our very busy time, so they could get more hours."

The amusement center hired about 15 seasonal workers last year.

Mr. Atkinson (972-248-4653, ext. 208) said that most of the summer hires will be high school students on vacation, but some will be college students brought on for management positions.

Grapevine-based video game retailer GameStop Inc. (www.gamestop.com) is doing a fair amount of summer hiring on a store-by-store basis, said director of human resources Chuck Smith. Many of the chain's employees are high school students.

"We're always looking for gamers, people who just love video games," he said. "Our big hiring push, of course, is during the holidays. But ... summertime, when schools are out, is great for us as well."

Young people must step up their efforts to find the summer openings, Ms. Ward said.

"The challenge is that teens, particularly the group I'm reaching, haven't necessarily understood the degree to which the economy has stalled," she said. "They write to us and say, 'Where are the jobs?' "

Young people also must know how to make a good impression on an employer who can pick and choose from a stack of candidates, Ms. Ward said.

Some, she said, aren't dressing appropriately or filling out applications properly – something as simple as overlooking instructions to print your last name first can hurt.

She said that it's not uncommon for college students or even college graduates to be applying for jobs that used to be filled by high schoolers.

But perseverance can pay off, Ms. Ward said.

"I would venture to say that anybody who really wants to work – and they really get their act together and they present themselves well – will find an opportunity," she said. "But for that lazy student, it's not going to happen."