

## **Unemployed, students, grads after same jobs**

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By Chris Bender

Jillian Ringwood, a sophomore at Middletown High School, wants to work at Blueberry Mountain Ice Cream but hasn't heard back. She applied at two other places with the same results.

Mike Rodvansky, a 16-year-old sophomore at Pine Bush High School, has been looking for a job in retail for a "couple of months" with no luck.

High school students in the mid-Hudson Valley are no longer just competing with each other and college students for jobs. Adults are now looking for retail and food service jobs that have traditionally belonged to students.

"The economy has been such that some opportunities may have been taken by adult workers," said Frank Surdey, regional administrator at the New York State Labor Department. "High school students may not have the luxury of being selective, but there should still be considerable opportunities."

Amy Conklin, the manager at Joyce Leslie in Middletown, said they are not currently hiring. But out of the 30 applications she gets each week, about half of the applicants are adults.

Other businesses have found adult applicants to be few and far between.

"We get more adults coming in for their kids," said Isy Lopez, assistant manager at Modell's Sporting Goods in Middletown.

The store receives 10 to 15 applications each day, with one or two being adults, Lopez said. Most adults are dissuaded once they learn it's only a part-time position, she said.

"The quantity of opportunities are directly related to the economic environment," Surdey said. "And in this economic environment, businesses may be cautious in hiring new employees."

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

The national rate of unemployment is at an eight-year high, but Surdey said that the Hudson Valley's unemployment rate is lower than New York state's and the nation's.

"You still see help-wanted signs," Surdey said. "There still will be opportunities, just not as many as in the past or in recent years."

Some students are finding opportunities easier than others.

Michele Robinholt, branch manager at the Adecco Employment Service in Goshen, said her office and the office in Newburgh both see an average of five to 10 high school students per month looking for retail or clerical jobs.

"A majority of them find work," Robinholt said. The others are too young and don't have transportation, she said.

Charles Caracappa, a Middletown High School senior, has worked at Media Play for a year and a half, and most of his friends have jobs; his last unemployed friend was hired by Home Depot almost a month ago.

Ali Berg, a freshman at Port Jervis High School, found seasonal work at the Oakland Valley Raceway Park in Cuddebackville, a go-cart track, from April to November. Her older sister, Lauren, 18, who has worked at the same hardware store for four years, said it helped that their brother works at the racetrack, too.

College graduates seeking their first jobs are also being affected by the tighter job market.

College grads are getting fewer job offers than those two years ago, according to The National Association of Colleges and Employers.

"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."

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

The number of young people in the workforce may have decreased, but Surdey believes it is because of increased competition within the group itself.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, the size of that demographic shrunk, but it's beginning to grow again, increasing the amount of young people in the market, Surdey said.

Ellen Bourhis Nolan, the director of career development at Mount Saint Mary's in Newburgh, said her office is quiet now because students are busy with finals, but she is anticipating a large crowd in the coming weeks.

"They realize they are running out of time," she said. "Most of them are asking for help with their resumes and looking to see if I have any contacts."

Graduates looking for their first job will have to work especially hard and start early to find opportunities, Surdey said.

But Surdey and Bourhis Nolan both believe there are jobs out there. Searching for them will require more patience.

"Employers might not go knocking at their door," Surdey said. "They might have to knock on their door."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.