Workers in demand for many jobs

County's fastest-growing fields include nursing, cosmetology, expert says

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Clark County's jobless rate is the highest it has been since the county was emerging from the last recession, but there is a bright side for hundreds of people seeking work. Employment in many job categories is on the rise.

This Labor Day, we asked state labor economist Scott Bailey to rank the jobs in Clark County where demand for workers is highest. What we found might surprise you.

"Most sectors are growing a little bit, with construction being the exception," Bailey said. "The list of fastest-growing jobs is pretty diverse."

Cosmetologist

It didn't surprise cosmetologist Crystal Nelson to learn that there are lots of opportunities for people with her skills and training.

"There are jobs everywhere," Nelson said. "There are 75 openings for hair stylists, hairdressers and cosmetologists in Clark County in the next year. And 18 to replace people leaving the region or the field.

Median pay is $10.50 an hour, which means that half make more and half make less, according to state figures.

"That sounds right," Nelson said.

Clark College fitness program tops

Three graduating classes. Three years of a 100 percent pass rate. The Clark College Fitness Trainer program has just marked that impressive accomplishment.

The five members of the graduating class of 2006 had a 100 percent pass rate on the National Strength and Conditioning Association Certified Personal Trainer exam. The exam is accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies. International, the current pass rate on the exam is 56.19 percent.

Clark's fitness trainer program features master's degree level exercise science and physical education instructors, as well as those who are certified with as Certified Strength & Conditioning Specialists (CSCS) credentials from the National Strength and Conditioning Association.

Information about the fitness trainer program is available online at www.clark.edu/fitnesstrainer.
Jobs:

From Page A1

"It's a hard business starting out until you build a clientele. When you get your own station, that's when you really start making money."

So who should consider pursuing one of these jobs? Well, you have to enjoy cutting hair, Nelson said, and you need to have good communication skills.

"People want a hairdresser who listens to what they want done to their hair," she said.

"After that, you have to be able to talk to people. All my clients are friends."

And then there's the education. Nelson earned a two-year degree in cosmetology from Walla Walla Community College. The state requires 1,600 hours of schooling or apprenticeship work for the license.

Registered nurse

A layoff from a shrinking industry led Michael Proudfoot, 49, to enter a field that was adding jobs. Until 1988 he worked as a tool and die machinist at the former Alcoa plant in west Vancouver.

When Alcoa closed the smelter, he retrained for a job in medical administration at Clark College. He went to work at Southwest Washington Medical Center, where nurses told him to seek more education.

With the required two-year degree under his belt, Proudfoot has been a registered nurse at the medical center for eight years.

As baby boomers age and require medical care, the demand for nurses is climbing, Bailey said. "Meanwhile, many current nurses are nearing the 30-year mark and retiring, so new people are needed to replace them."

In Clark County today, there are more than 3,080 registered nurses. State figures forecast 127 openings here in the next year, with 85 being completely new jobs. Half of RNs make more than $33.46 an hour, and half make less.

Proudfoot, who is married with four children, says he's never complained about the money he makes.

"Anyone would take more money if it were offered, but it's not the money that will gratify you, it's how you feel when you walk out the door at the end of the day."

Elementary school teacher

Educators require even more training than nurses, a bachelor's degree to start and continuing education once hired.

Most teachers start working toward a higher degree within two years of graduating from undergraduate programs, said Ann Tracey, 24.

After earning her bachelor's degree at Eastern Washington University in Cheney, Tracey started looking for jobs in the area to be near her family.

She was hired to teach first grade at Union Ridge Elementary in Ridgefield. Elementary school teachers are in high demand in Clark County because of local population growth and baby boomer retirements, said Art Edgerly, the Ridgefield School District superintendent.

Of the 84 openings expected across Clark County in the next year, many are due to turnover and retirements, but 35 positions are new creations, according to state figures.

The median yearly pay varies across school districts. In Ridgefield, half of all teachers make more than $54,000 and half make less.

Pay and job growth are not what drew her to the job, Tracey said. "Teaching was something I always wanted to do."