

Glendale brings new companies to the city

by *Rebekah L. Sanders* - Jun. 16, 2010 10:51 AM
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Jobs are on almost everyone's mind as the economic slump continues to strain company budgets and keep people out of work.

Glendale hit its highest unemployment rate in at least a decade last year, an average 8.6 percent, according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics.

But the city's economic-development professionals, tasked with bringing new companies and jobs to Glendale, see signs of progress.

In the past year, Banner Thunderbird Medical Center, the largest private employer in Glendale, hired 225 workers. Hundreds more jobs are expected as part of a massive expansion.

In the private, non-retail sector, Glendale added a company to its top five employers list: Humana, a Fortune 100 pharmacy-benefits administrator that has a staff of 400 at 91st and Glendale avenues.

The other top-three employers in Glendale are Arrowhead Hospital, AAA's vehicle-assistance call center and Honeywell, an aerospace manufacturer. Together, they employ more than 3,000 people.

City figures show in the past fiscal year that 20 companies moved to or expanded in G

lendale. The 1,776 positions created at Banner, Humana and others represented a 50-percent increase from the previous year.

Several other large companies are weeks away from announcing an arrival in Glendale, according to Economic Development Director Brian Friedman.

"It's been a fantastic year," he said.

The economic slump helped many cities retain existing employers but market uncertainty can have "a paralyzing effect" on businesses expanding or relocating, he said.

Friedman's team focused its efforts on high-wage, professional industries that Glendale wants to attract. Those industries are health care, education, renewable energy, aerospace/defense, advanced-business services and businesses related to sports, entertainment and tourism.

These sectors are designed to help Glendale advance its primary goal "to increase the standard of living of its residents . . . by attracting jobs at better-than-average salary levels," said John Lenio, an economist at CB Richard Ellis.

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Glendale claims about 12 percent of health-care jobs, according to a 2008 study of the West Valley labor market by WESTMARC and Maricopa Workforce Connections. Education, construction and the hotel/food industry make up about 10 percent each of the employment picture.

The retail sector, which typically pays workers less and is common in most communities, still accounts for about 17 percent.

Friedman said his staffers are trying to attract companies that offer services within an industry, like Magellan Health Services, which provides legal and technology support to health-care providers in Glendale.

City officials hope by increasing jobs near home, more residents will eliminate commutes to other cities.

"You really want residents to live, work, play and invest in your community," Friedman said.

About 20 percent of the Glendale workforce has jobs within the city. More people working and living in Glendale means more taxes spent there that go toward improving the community's quality of life, he said.

Glendale officials have leveraged relationships with real-estate professionals to fill the empty office space within the city, Friedman said.

The strategy is to be forefront in brokers' minds, said economist Lenio.

"Glendale wants to be thought of when a client is looking at Greater Phoenix who may

not otherwise have considered the West Valley," he said.

The idea has paid off. In the past year, companies have filled 1.4-million-square-foot of office space, compared to just 188,000 square feet the previous year, Friedman said.

"We have a reputation for getting the job done, for being aggressive and able to produce results," he said.

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