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Allan R. Ansell

Caught between budget cuts and increasing demands, social service agencies rely more and more on volunteer labor. Pictured: two volunteers at the Meridian distribution center for The Idaho Foodbank.

Jobs

DISAPPEAR

by Bethann Stewart with Kelsey Wilson

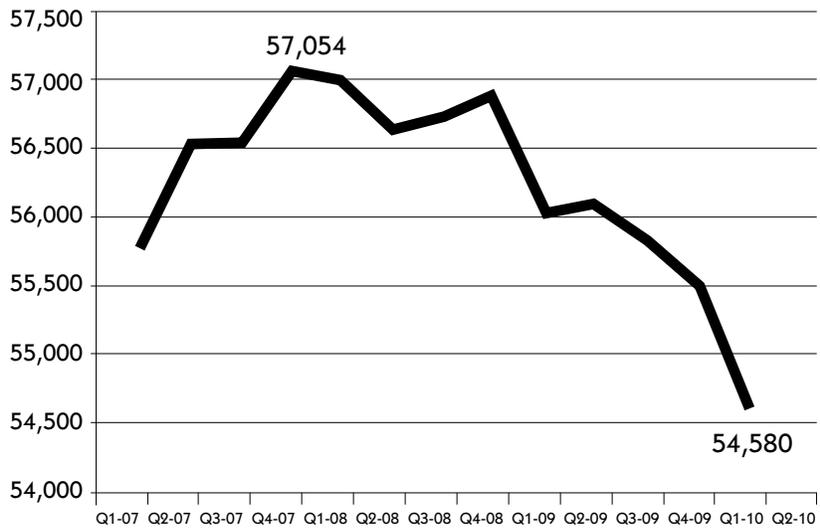
As pitchers, catchers and presidential candidates head into spring training, economists debate whether the current job crisis in the United States is cyclical—part of the boom-and-bust roller coaster of capitalism—or structural, signaling fundamental changes in the economy. For the unemployed, however, this is idle chatter as job growth in the state remains stagnant. Idahoan Terry Busch was laid off, re-hired and then laid off permanently.

“Every time I applied for a job, there was an average of about 500 or more applying for the same job. There was no one really hiring, and it was really tough. The economy destroyed my career,” he said.

When the recession began back in late 2007, Idaho’s unemployment rate was a mere 3 percent. It hit a high of 9.7 percent in 2010, and the 2011 average has just come in at 8.8 percent, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. In December 2011, the Conference Board, a Washington, D.C.-based business think tank, estimated that statistically there were still-

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Idaho Employers by Quarter, 2007–2010



more than three unemployed workers for every job listed in the state. As unemployed parents have been left with few options but to take jobs at the mall or local big-box stores, Idaho's teens find they have lots of time on their hands. Idaho has one of the highest rates of teen unemployment in the country. In 2011, it was nearly 30 percent for 16–19 year olds, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The official unemployment rate is based solely on people who have been looking for jobs in the past four weeks. It does not include: part-time workers who had and want a full-time job; the long-term unemployed who have given up trying to find work; or the self-employed.

To help companies remain profitable, workers have been forced to accept time off without pay, inconsistent work hours and part-time, temporary contract work. More businesses are looking to hire temporary workers and workers with multiple skill sets, said Wendy Gregory, Boise branch manager of ManPower, a temporary staffing agency. For example, call centers have many positions for workers with computer skills who also know how to offer excellent customer service at the same time. Unfortunately, not many people can type and talk on the phone at the same time, Gregory said.



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Construction jobs were hard to come by during the 2008 recession, but several public works projects helped bridge the gap for some. Pictured: worker installing pipe at the old Ada County Courthouse, now a state-owned building.

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Layoffs of more than 1,000 workers in 2007 foreshadowed the countywide decline in manufacturing jobs. Pictured: microchip lab.

"I see people who are overly qualified for entry-level jobs, and I see people who come in and are not qualified enough for the specific job," Gregory said. "Companies have downsized certain positions and are looking for people who have more skills wrapped into one job title." To create more jobs, the city needs to be able to attract companies, she said. Boise has a number of initiatives to help bring companies to the area and to try to create jobs, said city spokesman Adam Park. For example, the city partnered with Boise State University to create a "green" business incubator in the former fire department administration building downtown to help entrepreneurs launch their ideas. The mayor also regularly visits businesses to see how the city can help them, and he created a roundtable of business leaders to discuss the challenges they are facing. City staff includes an economic development team, which functions to attract, retain and expand businesses in

Boise. Ultimately, it is the role of the private sector to create jobs, not city government, said Cece Gassner of the mayor's economic development team.

In the private sector, the Boise Young Professionals, a branch of the Boise Chamber of Commerce, came up with an innovative way to spur startups. The group initiated the competition among its members called "B Launched" in September 2011 with the goal of creating one or two new startups within a year. But even if their project is successful, it won't come close to replacing the 60,000 jobs that evaporated from the economy when the housing bubble burst, taking the construction industry with it. The earliest that Idaho may see a return of those jobs is late 2014, according to the state Department of Labor.

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Kelsey Wilson of Vancouver, Wash. graduated in December 2011 with a degree in political science. Her career goal is to become a lobbyist for the gun or oil industries.