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Where the jobs are

Even in a recession, some fields offer strong prospects for job growth

By *MICHAEL L. DIAMOND*
 BUSINESS WRITER

Given the economic turmoil, Eric Linzey and Nick Borup could have found worse places to be Tuesday than standing in a maintenance bay at Brookdale Community College in Middletown, preparing for brighter days ahead.

They are part of the school's automotive technology program, and they were confident they will find work when they graduate, recession or not.

"It gets easier with the practice you get here," said Borup, a 19-year-old Jackson resident, as he and Linzey peered at a computer screen to diagnose the problems on a 2004 Buick LeSabre.

With the economy in meltdown mode and workers hanging on for dear life, the Asbury Park Press identified several occupations that are likely to be in high demand in the next five years — and offer high enough wages to pay the bills.

They range from automobile mechanics to accountants, occupations that seemingly have little in common, but in fact have several links. They require education after high school. They require workers to continuously update their skills. And they are indispensable.

An auto mechanic will be in demand whether it's to fix gas-guzzling SUVs or energy-efficient hybrids. An accountant will be needed to prepare taxes for companies that manufacture widgets or sell products on the Internet.

"The best you can hope for is to invest in your own education and training in fields that are in demand — so far as you can tell," said Carl Van Horn, director of the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University.

The list is derived from a New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development report that was released in November and forecast demand for jobs in 2016. Fast-growing jobs such as home health aides, child-care workers and bartenders were left off because they pay less than \$30,000 a year.

Those that remained seemed to fall into the following categories:

Technology. Jobs for network systems and data communications analysts, who average annual salaries of \$82,670, are expected to increase 41.1 percent. Computer software engineers, who average \$98,640, are expected to increase 37.7 percent. And network and computer systems administrators, who average \$76,530, are expected to see their field grow 21.1 percent.

"I would expect (demand) to continue to grow," said Cary Brech, director of engineering at Vonage Holdings Corp. in Holmdel. "That is always a challenge to find people with the right skills, the right attitude, the right aptitude."

Health care. Jobs for registered nurses, who average \$70,900, are expected to increase 16.4 percent. Child, family and school social workers, who average \$52,880, are expected to increase 16.1 percent. And dental assistants, who average \$35,680, are expected to increase 30.1 percent.

"It's a great career," Melinda L. Wagner, a Red Bank dentist, said of dental assistants and hygienists. "It's a busy environment. It requires people to be on the ball. You don't sit and drink coffee. It's a fast, high-paced career for energetic people."

Education. Jobs for special-education teachers, who average \$56,780, are expected to increase 16 percent. Elementary school teachers, who average \$57,980, are expected to increase 10.4 percent. Self-enrichment education teachers, who average \$49,820, are expected to increase 21.1 percent. (Self-enrichment teachers include art teachers, flying teachers, dance teachers, on so on.)

"I think it's something parents will always want for their children," said Bonnie Behrman, owner of the Bay Head School of Ballet and Violin. "Maybe not all parents. But it will stay important."

Professional services. Jobs for lawyers, who average \$120,060, are expected to increase 10.2 percent. Securities, commodities and financial services sales agents, who average \$102,520, are expected to increase 10.9 percent. And accountants and auditors, who average \$74,040, are expected to increase 10.6 percent.

Accounting firms are preparing for a shortage when baby boomers retire. They are trying to attract students who might otherwise be lured by more glamorous jobs, such as finance, said Eileen Monesson, a spokeswoman for Cowan, Guteski & Co., an accounting firm based in Toms River.

"There is a shortage of young accountants coming out of college and this has been going on for a number of years," Monesson said.

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Blue collar labor. Jobs for plumbers, pipefitters and steamfitters, who average \$58,340, are expected to increase by 7.7 percent. Automotive service technicians and mechanics, who average \$38,840, are increasing by 9.5 percent.

There is no telling what cars will look like in 20 years. But students said they are learning basic skills and are prepared to adapt to whatever the industry throws at them.

"I think we'll always be in demand," Vinny Butka, 19, of Brick, said. "People have to drive."

ON THE WEB: State report projecting job growth through the year 2016 (.pdf file):

<http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/lpa/dmograph/lfproj/proj%202016.pdf>

Additional Facts

FUTURE JOB GROWTH

Five fastest growing jobs that pay more than \$30,000 a year.
OCCUPATION PCT. CHANGE BY 2016

1. Medical assistant 42.1 percent
2. Network systems and
data communications analyst 41.1 percent
3. Computer software engineers 37.7 percent
4. Dental assistant 30.1 percent
5. Computer systems analyst 23.8 percent

Source: New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development

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