

A Northeast Wisconsin Guide to Employment Opportunities



SCHOOLS, BUS COMPANIES IN THE HUNT FOR DRIVERS

Buses arrive, deliver students and depart from Shawano Community High School on Oct. 25 as a new school week dawns. Bus companies and school districts all across northeast Wisconsin are having difficulty hiring bus drivers, a trend that's being seen nationwide. **SEE STORY ON PAGE 2**

LEE PULASKI | NEW MEDIA

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Schools, bus companies need drivers

Companies and school districts offer incentives to raise employment

By **LUKE REIMER**

Reporter

School districts in Shawano County and Oconto County are looking for school bus drivers.

"We have very low employment," said Peggy Gordon, who is a terminal manager at Lamers Bus Lines and contracts with the Gillett School District.

Due to the low numbers of available drivers, school staff has been forced to drive students to both school and to athletic events.

Oconto Falls athletic director Jerry Moynihan is one of the staff members who is stepping up to make sure that students get to their games on time. He went through the process of obtaining a school bus driver's license last year.

"It is not the easiest thing to drive a school bus," said Moynihan.

He said the process to get a license to drive a school bus is rigorous.

"It is a challenge to driving these buses," said Moynihan. "You have to go through three weeks of training. There are tests that you have to take through the DMV, and I had to practice for two weeks."

He said there is an upside to driving the buses.

"The kids are excited to see me drive the bus," said Moynihan. "I will see the students in school and see the smiles on their faces when we get on the bus."

Other than sports games, Moynihan said that Oconto Falls has had problem with their morning and afternoon routes in bringing students to and from school.

"We have had to condense our routes," said Moynihan.

Gordon also mentioned that she has had to condense routes for the Gillett School District.

"We have gone down from eight to seven," said Gordon.

With the lack of drivers, Gordon said that she and Lamers has been accepting and reviewing applications.

"We are looking for people who have had their license for three years, have a good driving background and don't have a criminal background," said Gordon. "We have two interviews coming shortly for drivers."



Students climb aboard a Kobussen bus on Oct. 25 to be taken to school.

LEE PULASKI | NEW MEDIA

Gordon said that in terms of getting student athletes to games on time and driving students home from school, drivers have had to drop students off at games early and go back to school to get everyone else home.

Wittenberg-Birnamwood superintendent Garrett Rogowski said the school district is also getting creative in how to get students to games on time.

"We have had to start games a little bit later," said Rogowski.

He added that as the school district has been looking for drivers, they are offering incentives.

"We are offering a competitive hourly rate," said Rogowski. "We are paying for training."

Gordon also mentioned that Lamers is offering positions for \$10/hour.

Ed Short, who is a terminal manager with Kobussen and contracts with Shawano and Bonduel, said that Kobussen has offered a \$1,500 sign-on bonus in the summer.

"We continue to offer our existing drivers a \$500 referral bonus," said

Short. "Coming up on Veterans Day, we are having an open house where the company will be offering up to a \$2,000 sign-on bonus. The Kobussens also enlisted a pay increase for the drivers."

Short said that if someone is interested in driving, more information can be found at www.kobussen.com.

"This is a great opportunity for moms, retired, or those with mornings or afternoons open and want to pick up some extra money," said Short. "Many think that a bus is too big to drive, but people are surprised to see others change their mind when they get in a bus."

Short added that he cannot pinpoint one reason why there is such a shortage for drivers.

"I don't think that you can point to one reason," said Short. "It has just been a perfect storm. There are so many factors that play into keeping someone from applying. Obviously, we continue to have COVID-19 concerns. There were also extra payments for unemployment. Some

people that we talked to said that, life is too short and they are going to fully retire."

Rogowski added that another reason that employment could be down is due to the limited scheduled.

"Maybe it is due to only driving for two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening," said Rogowski. "This job is attractive to those that have time."

Like Short, Moynihan believes that the issue comes from a number of factors.

"We had an employment decrease prior to the pandemic," said Moynihan. "COVID-19 was the tipping point."

Although the outlook looks bleak, some are saying that it will get better.

"We are getting creative and those who are driving are doing the best that they can," said Gordon.

"We are hopeful for more drivers," said Rogowski. "Our group now does a great job, but we are confident that we will get back to higher employment."

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Where are the workers?

Cutoff of jobless aid spurs no influx

By **CHRISTOPHER RUGABER, CASEY SMITH AND LARRY FENN**

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Earlier this year, an insistent cry arose from business leaders and Republican governors: Cut off a \$300-a-week federal supplement for unemployed Americans. Many people, they argued, would then come off the sidelines and take the millions of jobs that employers were desperate to fill.

Yet three months after half the states began ending that federal payment, there's been no significant influx of job seekers.

In states that cut off the \$300 check, the workforce — the number of people who either have a job or are looking for one — has risen no more than it has in the states that maintained the payment. That federal aid, along with two jobless

aid programs that served gig workers and the long-term unemployed, ended nationally Sept. 6. Yet America's overall workforce actually shrank that month.

"Policymakers were pinning too many hopes on ending unemployment insurance as a labor market boost," said Fiona Greig, managing director of the JPMorgan Chase Institute, which used JPMorgan bank account data to study the issue. "The work disincentive effects were clearly small."

Labor shortages have persisted longer than many economists expected, deepening a mystery at the heart of the job market. Companies are eager to add workers and have posted a near-record number of available jobs. Unemployment remains elevated. The economy still has 5 million fewer jobs than it did before the pandemic. Yet job growth slowed in August and September.

An analysis of state-by-state data by The Associated Press found that workforces in the 25 states that maintained the \$300 payment actually grew slightly more from May

through September, according to data released Friday, than they did in the 25 states that cut off the payment early, most of them in June. The \$300-a-week federal check, on top of regular state jobless aid, meant that many of the unemployed received more in benefits than they earned at their old jobs.

An earlier study by Arindrajit Dube, an economist at University of Massachusetts, Amherst and several colleagues found that the states that cut off the \$300 federal payment saw a small increase in the number of unemployed taking jobs. But it also found that it didn't draw more people off the sidelines to look for work.

Economists point to a range of factors that are likely keeping millions of former recipients of federal jobless aid from returning to the workforce. Many Americans in public-facing jobs still fear contracting COVID-19, for example. Some families lack child care.

Other people, like Rachel Montgomery of Anderson, Indiana, have grown to cherish the opportunity to spend more time with their families

and feel they can get by financially, at least for now. Montgomery, a 37-year-old mother, said she has become much "pickier" about where she's willing to work after having lost a catering job last year. Losing the \$300-a-week federal payment hasn't changed her mind. She'll receive her regular state jobless aid for a few more weeks.

"Once you've stayed home with your kids and family like this, who wants to physically have to go back to work?" she said. "As I'm looking and looking, I've told myself that I'm not going to sacrifice pay or flexibility working remotely when I know I'm qualified to do certain things. But what that also means is that it's taking longer to find those kinds of jobs."

Indeed, the pandemic appears to have caused a re-evaluation of priorities, with some people deciding to spend more time with family and others insistent on working remotely or gaining more flexible hours.

Some former recipients, especially older, more affluent ones, have decided to retire earlier than they had



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planned. With Americans' overall home values and stock portfolios having surged since the pandemic struck, Fed officials estimate that up to 2 million more people have retired since then than otherwise would have.

And after having received three stimulus checks in 18 months, plus federal jobless aid in some cases, most households have larger cash cushions than they did before the pandemic. A result is that some people are taking time to consider their options before rushing back into the job market.

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Wisconsin's unemployment rate remains at 3.9% for 6th month

ASSOCIATED PRESS

MADISON — Wisconsin's unemployment rate for September remained unchanged at 3.9% for the sixth month in a row, the state Department of Workforce Development reported Oct. 21.

The report is the first since enhanced federal unemployment benefits expired on Sept. 6.

Republicans had argued that the benefit motivated people not to work, only worsening the state's worker shortage problem. But Democrats and labor force experts said the shortage, which has been a problem for years, was driven by a variety of factors.

Gov. Tony Evers, a Democrat, vetoed a Republican-authored bill that would have ended the benefits this summer. An attempt to override that veto failed in July.

Wisconsin's unemployment rate was better than the national average of 4.8% in September.

Private sector jobs in Wisconsin



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dropped by 100 in September compared to August. There were 51,800 more private sector jobs in September than a year ago.

On the national level, The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits fell last week to a

new low point since the pandemic erupted, evidence that layoffs are declining as companies hold onto workers.

Unemployment claims dropped 6,000 to 290,000 last week, the third straight drop, the Labor Department said Oct. 21. That's the fewest people to apply for benefits since March 14, 2020, when the pandemic intensified. Applications for jobless aid, which generally track the pace of layoffs, have fallen steadily from about 900,000 in January.



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