State's Job Picture Finally Up

By DAVID RUNK
Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) – Since losing his job doing technical work for a Detroit-area television station more than two years ago, Ronni Brewster has worked part-time as a lunch assistant at his daughter's elementary school, completed a yearlong graphics design training program and searched exhaustively for work.

He got word last week that about 5 months remain before his unemployment assistance runs out, and he's trying his best to remain optimistic as his job hunt continues. Despite the state's lingering economic troubles, Michigan is his home – and it's where he wants to stay.

"I'm one of those people who are totally pro-Michigan," said Brewster, 45 of Madison Heights. "I love the state. I never want to leave the state. I'm going to make it work. I'm just not sure how."

The employment picture has generally brightened in Michigan over the past year, with the January unemployment rate released this week declining to 10.7 percent _ three full percentage points below its January 2010 level of 13.7 percent.

But with 508,000 people looking for jobs in Michigan, and half of them unemployed for six months or more, there's little relief for the long-term unemployed.

Of the 13.9 million Americans unemployed in January, about 1.8 million had been without work for 99 weeks, or essentially two years, according to government data. That number of unemployed is nearly double from January 2010.

Michigan tracks its long-term unemployed by a shorter 27 week period, and the state reports that the percentage of those out of work for that time or longer has remained relatively stable over the past year.

"That's obviously a real problem," said Jim Rhein, a labor market analyst with the state's Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth. Still, he added: "It's a lot better that it was. ... We're headed in the right direction, but we're nowhere near where we need to be."

In January, Michigan added a net total of 39,700 jobs, the second-largest gain among states, while its labor force edged down by 5,000. Michigan's declining labor force over the past year – down by 74,000, or 1.5 percent _– has helped push its unemployment rate lower.

And those who find work can be faced with having to leave a career they've spend decades developing. People like Chris Schim.

After 27 years as a librarian for an advertising agency in Detroit, Schim saw his job get cut. He spent 18 months looking for work – something in his field, anything _ before taking a job in March 2010 as a property manager for a 221-unit apartment building. It pays less than half as much as his old job and doesn't include health benefits, but he's happy to be working.

"I looked for work the whole time," said Schim, 59, of Detroit. "It was very disillusioning."

After about six months of looking for a job, Schim recalled that it became clear that he wasn't going to find work again as a librarian. He said his age and experience likely made things more difficult _ and there was "just nothing out there."

Rooted to a Detroit home he owns with his partner in one of the worst real estate markets in the country, moving wasn't an option to find work. While the analytical skills he developed as a librarian aren't being used in his current job, he's found that his attention to detail and ability to deal with people have helped. And he's learning a new set of skills, including how to manage a staff of five.

"I'm coming to peace with what I'm doing," Schim said.

Michigan's economy remains worse than most of the rest of the nation, but there's been a lot of improvement _ including 16 months of declining unemployment.

Michigan State University economics professor Charles Ballard said the state's month-to-month employment increase in January was the biggest since the summer of 1998. The overall trend, he said, offers a psychological boost.

"What we've been through recently has been by far the scariest economic situation in the lifetime of most people," Ballard said of the recent recession. "I had a stable job, but it was scary for me. For people who are teetering on the brink of losing a job, this was by far the scariest."

Brewster had worked in broadcasting for 18 years, doing master control work for TV stations. When the company he worked for moved its operations to Indiana in January 2009, he got severance and was thrust into a job market that would see Michigan's unemployment rate soar that summer.

Out of work, he enrolled in a graphics design training program that was subsidized by the state's Michigan Works! job training agency. He looked at losing his job as a chance to train for a career that might allow him to use his creative side, but the work hasn't materialized.

Born and raised in Michigan, he bought his childhood home from his siblings after his parents died and has put a lot of money into repairs. The single father of a 9-year-old girl, the prospect of his unemployment benefits running out before finds work, he said, is "terrifying." They would have run out sooner, but the part-time school job helped extend his eligibility for assistance.

"I'm trying not to get pessimistic, since that doesn't help me," he said.

Analysts have said that after years of decline, manufacturing jobs in Michigan, particularly related to automotive, have finally stabilized.

GM CEO Dan Akerson will be keynote speaker at the Annual 2011 SAE Congress Banquet in Detroit.

GM Sponsors the 2011 SAE Congress

by Gerald Scott
Editor
U.S. Auto Scene

Mark your calendars, Motor City auto industry, because here comes the 2011 SAE World Congress, right around the corner and bigger and better than ever, say organizers.

GM is the principle corporate sponsor this year with LG Chem serving as the associated supplier sponsor – officially called the Tier One Strategic Sponsor.

"Charging Forward Together" is the theme and this being the auto industry, they sure don't mean credit card charging. Rather, the theme and 2011 Congress activities group around the rush to plug-in electric vehicles and all that could possibly entail from an engineering point of view, of course.

Mark April 12-14 at Cobo Center in Detroit for the 2011 SAE World Congress, when thousands of auto and transportation engineers gather to give papers, discuss trends and intuit changes impacting the global car business.

"'Charging Forward Together', the SAE 2011 World Congress theme, elicits not only enthusiasm, but a willingness as a community to expand the industry's knowledge as a team," said Karl-Friedrich Stracke, GM vice president, Global Vehicle Engineering and 2011 World Congress General Chairman, in a press kit statement.

"'Charging Forward Together' highlights the importance of continuing the evolution of automotive propulsion technology and energy efficiency – as well as representing the continued recovery and progress in our industry," said Stracke.

"World Congress is a strong commitment to the individual engineer as well as the industry," said Stracke. "There is no other place for those in the automotive community to gather and expand their knowledge and training; to walk away from every activity knowing more talented people and significant information than when they arrived."

Indeed, the menu of activities large enough that some of the professional development seminars will be held at the GM RenCen on top of the main activities at Cobo Center.

Here are some of the keynote speakers, presenters and programs at the show:

- Annual Banquet – keynote speaker is Dan Akerson, CEO, General Motors Co.;
- Opening Ceremony – Ray Lane, managing partner of Kleiner Perkins, Caulfield & Byers;
- Wednesday Management Program – Cathy Zoi, acting Under Secretary for Energy, U.S. Department of Energy;
- Thursday Management Program – Rodney O'Neal, CEO and President of Delphi;

There will be a Ride and Drive for attendees – including access to the Chevrolet Volt, Ford's EcoDrive system and supplier Protean's modified EV pickup truck, among other vehicles.

Also, companies seeking automotive engineering professionals will be able to meet prospective candidates at the Career Fair.

The always busy and popular Career Fair will be held Tuesday, April 12, and Wednesday, April 13 (only) from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. each day at Cobo.

In addition to meeting with potential employers, job seekers can participate in a number of networking activities, including a Career Development Session for career skills; attending a free Resume Clinic where mobility industry experts will critique candidate resumes, and other practical advice for landing an engineering job.

SAE International is a global association of more than 128,00 engineers and related technical experts in the aerospace, automotive and commercial-vehicle industries.

Ford Earns EPA 'Energy Star' Award

DEARBORN – Ford Motor Company's actions to reduce the amount of energy used to manufacture vehicles and support its U.S. operations have earned it the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) coveted 2011 ENERGY STAR Award for the sixth consecutive year.

The 2011 ENERGY STAR Award for Sustained Excellence recognizes Ford's continued leadership and commitment to protecting the environment through energy efficiency.

In 2010, Ford improved energy efficiency in its U.S. manufacturing facilities by 2 percent bringing Ford's 5-year improvement to more than 15 percent.

The cumulative improvement represents 1,875 million kilowatt hours (kWh) which is equivalent to the amount of energy required to power 60,000 average U.S. homes for a year. Ford establishes new baseline measures of energy efficiency – natural gas and electricity – every five years and normalizes for changes in production volume and weather.

"We are extremely proud of the steps we've taken to improve responsible use of natural resources," said Donna Inch, Chairman and CEO, Ford Land. "Energy efficiency is critical to running a strong and successful business, delivering both financial and environmental benefits."

Ford's energy efficiency improvements include:

- Improved paint processes including implementation of the 3-Wet Paint Process and recirculation of air in paint spray booths. These process improvements eliminate bake ovens between paint booths, reduce paint booth footprint and reduce the amount of ventilation air that must be heated and humidified to paint a car. The energy savings per plant is approximately 35 million kWh annually.
- Retooled powertrain manufacturing facilities with energy efficient equipment and process changes including flexible machining, minimum quantity lubrication and elimination of heated parts washers
- Improved metering at manufacturing facilities allows Ford to measure daily and weekly production and non-production energy use
- Installation of energy efficient lighting systems at various Ford locations including a 50,000 light fixture upgrade in southeast Michigan that will reduce energy use by 18.2 million kWh and is expected to save Ford $1.3 million annually.
- Development and launch of a commonized sustainability measurement scale for all manufacturing plants worldwide.

The scale evaluates performance in all areas of sustainability – energy, air quality, water, waste and others – and will be used to plan and measure future improvements
Installed a solar power generation system at Ford's Michigan Assembly Plant delivering 500 kW of renewable energy which is integrated with 750-kW battery storage facility. This facility will help power the plant and production of Ford's new Focus, Focus Electric, next-generation hybrid and plug-in hybrid vehicles

In 2010, Ford earned nine ENERGY STAR Building Labels for efficiency improvements. Ford has launched a 5-year plan to obtain LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification for a number of Dearborn-based office buildings.

"Ford has earned EPA's highest ENERGY STAR award - the 2011 Sustained Excellence Award," said Elizabeth Craig, Acting Director of EPA's Office of Atmospheric Programs.

"Ford's long term leadership and commitment to energy efficiency demonstrates the types of accomplishments that we can all achieve in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and protecting our global environment. We look forward to their continued partnership and leadership."

Altair Set to Open New Office in Spain for Autos

TROY – Altair Engineering, Inc., a global provider of simulation technology and engineering services, last week announced that it will open its first office in Spain soon.

The new Madrid location will provide regional enterprise support services to major aerospace, automotive and energy companies and offer software to those business sectors in collabortion with its distributor DSP, located in Tarragona, Spain.

Operating through a newly formed subsidiary, Altair Software and Services, engineers in the new Madrid office will work directly with clients to design and carry out computer simulation projects using Altair's HyperWorks suite of computer-aided engineering software tools.

The Madrid staff will be led by Stefano Deiana, managing director of Spain for Altair.

The new office will be staffed with simulation experts to support the region's advanced manufacturing community.

This will include major aerospace companies where Altair engineers will employ HyperWorks and collaborate with client engineering teams to develop lightweight, high-performance aircraft systems.

Altair's optimization and solver technologies, such as OptiStruct and Radioss, will be deeply integrated as part of the process to create designs incorporating less or lighter material for components while retaining the strength, durability and performance of conventional designs.

"Altair has worked in the aerospace, automotive and energy industries across Europe for many years," said Deiana.

"Now, the mounting demand for HyperWorks software and for a direct presence to provide enterprise services within those sectors, particularly aerospace, have prompted us to develop a Madrid office that will serve companies in both Spain and Portugal."

The new Spain site extends Altair's presence in Europe, where it also oeprates offices in France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Globally, Altair has offices located throughout North America, South America, Europe and Asia/Pacific.

Altair Engineering says that it empowers client innovation and decision-making through technology that optimizes the value of business and engineering information.

The 25-year-old supplier firm is headquartered locally in Troy.

DARPA and Ford Issue HPC Study

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Council on Competitiveness, in partnership with the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), is releasing a case study highlighting the potential for high performance computing to spur innovative solutions for the challenges facing the global auto industry and the American manufacturing sector.

The report, "From Safety Performance to EcoBoost Technology: HPC Enables Innovation and Productivity at Ford Motor Company," studies how HPC and computer-aided engineering is helping Ford lead innovation in the industry.

"HPC is key to delivering on our overall business plan; optimizing product development, creating high quality products and improving time-to-market," said Nand K. Kochhar, Ford's executive technical leader for global computer-aided engineering, and chief engineer for global materials and standards engineering. "With advances in computing technologies, it is possible to accomplish this in a cost-effective manner."

The report is one of 10 case studies to be released under the project with DARPA. The purpose of the case study is to address the challenges facing the U.S. manufacturing secotr and how the use of HPC can increase national productivity and competitiveness.

"The Ford Motor Company case study clearly demonstrates the tremendous opportunity and value that HPC can offer," said Council Senior Vice President Dr. Cynthia McIntyre, who is championing HPC visibility.

Visteon, 3M Showcase New Demo Car

MUMBAI, India – Visteon Corp. and 3M last week introducted to the India market an approach to integrating advanced features and innovations for cars, designed to meet the preferences of drivers and the needs of vehicle manufacturers in this fast-growing market.

Based on extensive consumer research in India, the two global companies collaborated on the Growth Market Project, leading to last week's unveiling of a demonstration car – called the Growth Market Car.

The demo car shows how technologies can be integrated to enhance the driving experience, while meeting cost and packaging requirements of vehicle manufacturers in India.

Key themes of the Growth Market Car are modular design – with certain interior components and systems that can be installed or excluded based on driver preference; and scalable platforms – ones engineered to allow a wide range of features to be added cost-effectively.

Visteon and 3M experts further ensured the styling, deisgn and features of the Growth Market Car appeal to Indian consumers while offering maximum flexibility.

"Visteon conducted extensive research to better identify the mobility wants and needs of today's consumers in India," explained Tim Yeardon, Visteon global director of innovation and design.

"New automotive solutions were born from these findings and, together with 3M, were integrated into this demonstration car to share with manufacturers, so they can consider implementing these technologies in future models."

In 2010, Visteon conducted extensive research with Indian consumers to better define craftsmanship as it relates to auto interior components and overall interior harmony.