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## Demand for skilled temporary workers heats up



Photo by Jerry Powers

Link Staffing client service manager Tommy Burdette, right, interacts with Link's field employees, Cory Kittles, left, and Evan Cisneros.

By ALICE ADAMS  
Employment Correspondent

Houston's skilled work force is predicted to experience an increased demand for temporary workers in the next several quarters.

Daniel Gibbs, vice-president of Skilled Craftsman of Texas, is optimistic about the next six months.

"I think that manufacturing, overall, has made its turn and is moving into an upward swing," said Gibbs, whose company has specialized in permanent and temporary staffing for manufacturing industries in the Houston area for the past 13 years.

In years past, when unemployment was at three percent, it was difficult to find skilled people to fill jobs in the Houston area, he said. But today, with unemployment numbers so high, more individual craftsmen are available and looking for work, so this situation will welcome the upturn in the current job cycle.

"We cater to manufacturing customers," Gibbs said. "Our staff are individuals who come from skilled trades and know what it's like to work in a shop, so they are able to match the right skill levels with the right jobs."

Gibbs said his customers also are very optimistic.

"Many of the manufacturers we work with on a continuing basis are putting

individuals we have working on overtime," he said. "That's a good sign, when companies have backlogs and more orders than they can get out. That means they don't have enough people to keep up with the pace of business, so I'd say the market for employment in the trades is very upbeat."

Michelle Bearden, operations manager for Link Staffing, agreed.

"The summer season looks very promising," she said. "We usually see a gradual ramping up that begins in May and runs through third quarter because many industries experience their seasonal peak during summer months. That's one of benefits we provide to our clients — access to a larger work force that is there when they need them and gone when they don't."

Bearden said Link supplies personnel in such areas as qualified crafts or trades and light industrial to semi-skilled and unskilled labor.

"We specialize in crafts and trades, semi-skilled and unskilled workers, and have a staff of specialists that work with our clients on increasing their productivity," she said.

Aside from supplying the summer up tick in skilled trades demand, both agencies provide summer vacation fill-ins.

"Filling in for full-time staff vacations is definitely one of the reasons our clients need temps," Bearden said, "and because many employees schedule vacations dur-

ing the summer months, this is a great opportunity for temporary workers to find employment."

Bearden said the summer months — and an increase in tourism in the Houston area — also creates a demand for temporary workers to fill hospitality positions, and as construction increases in the area, Link Staffing experiences a higher demand for skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers.

Because of the cyclic nature of the demand for crafts and trades position, temporary staffers see challenges in recruiting highly skilled crafts and trade workers for the summer months.

"In the local area, finding qualified manual machinists is requiring us to find creative recruiting sources," Bearden said. "Apprentice programs the industry once relied upon for a continuing supply of new workers have all but become a thing of the past and as experienced workers retire, vacancies continue to increase."

Gibbs said the skilled positions he sees in highest demand is that of machinist, usually with three to five years minimum experience.

"Pay for machinists in this market is anywhere from \$12-\$13 an hour to \$18 on high end, depending on machines they are working on, manual or CNC," Gibbs said. "The areas of demand I expect to see increase over the next few months is welding, assemblers and shop helpers."

"Another position that is challenging to fill in Houston is professional drivers with their Commercial Driver's License," Bearden said. "Transportation and logistics are two industries that have quickly rebounded as economy has begun to grow, and an increase in demand plus increased safety requirements from DOT is resulting in a supply/demand imbalance. Local driving schools can't train drivers fast enough to meet the current demand, and those who have the proper credentials often, when industry and economy takes a downturn, go find work elsewhere."

Bearden said she also expected to continue to see a high demand for all skilled crafts and trades related to construction industry, particularly carpenters, electricians, plumbers and equipment operators.

Link Staffing has seven Houston-area offices. Applicants can call 1-800-848-LINK, Monday through Friday between 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. for directions to nearest office. Applicants should apply, ready to work, be prepared to pass a pre-employment drug screening and have with them a picture ID and social security card.

To apply for work at Skilled Craftsmen of Texas, applicants can go to the office, located at 7015 Gulf Freeway, Suite 231, Houston 77087 or they can fax a resume to 713-641-4615. All applicants should be prepared for a background check, drug screen and integrity testing.