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## Weekly Edition

### Help Unwanted: LI staffing firms

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The nation's unemployment rate tumbled to 4.4 percent in March, the lowest in six years. While that's good news for the economy as a whole, it's spreading little cheer among staffing firms that profit from people seeking work.

On Long Island, where the jobless rate hovers around 4 percent, it's now a tight market that rivals the heady economic times of the early 1990s. While economic experts remain split on the cause of the worker shortage – an increasing number blame the exodus of young people from the Island – staffing companies are clearly working much harder at finding people needing jobs than jobs needing people.

"Right now, it's become a candidate-type market," said John Magliore, chief operating officer of Melville-based Access Staffing. "There's a shortage of talent."

Magliore said his firm had cut back attendance at job fairs, since fewer applicants were attending, but as the market tightens further, Access is heading back to the often sparsely attended shows.

"We're going back as an additional tool to recruit," he said.

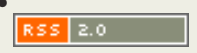
Nationally, computer services, the financial fields, health care and education are

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showing the strongest job growth. On Long Island, current shortages are for customer service representatives, data entry, legal staff and administrative assistants. That's in addition to the perennial shortage of nurses and accountants.

Kim Cottage, vice president of key accounts and marketing for GreyStone Staffing in Massapequa, said her firm has broadened recruiting efforts by adding open houses and expanding interviewing.

"We have open houses all the time," she said. "Open interviews all the time. We work very much by referral."

Referrals, yes, but plenty of advertising, too. GreyStone runs ads on the Internet and in newspapers, on job boards and at schools. And GreyStone is one of the firms offering those raffle prizes – including gift baskets, bicycles, gift certificates to Starbucks and Blockbuster, free training and new televisions – to people who show up at job fairs and open houses.

Access, meanwhile, has redesigned its Web site and begun sending out e-mail blasts; it's also considering radio ads.

If recruiting efforts have increased, so have the benefits offered by staffing firms. GreyStone touts benefits packages designed to attract staffers who may not want to work full-time, but still want health insurance; this is where the referrals come into play, Cottage noted.

"A lot of the temporaries here refer temporaries because of the benefits we give the temps," she said.

GreyStone also offers temporaries access to 401(k) plans and paid holiday, vacation, personal and sick time after 1,200 hours worked.

Of course, the best way to attract candidates is a record of speedy employment, and speed to market has become critical, according to Keith Banks, president of Melville-based Lloyd Staffing.

"The pace has certainly picked up. As soon as we find that person, we have to have a place for them," Banks said. "There's no longer a window where the person is on the market or on the bench waiting for another opportunity."

"It's really moved into a candidate relationship management arena," Banks said.

Finally, you can always import talent, a technique being tried by Sigma Staffing, based in Melville and Islandia.

"We have people who drive vans who will bring people from Manhattan to our clients on Long Island," said Herbert Ehrlich, the firm's CEO. "They drive them to work."