

## NEW IT JOB HOT SPOTS

In once-thriving IT job centers such as Silicon Valley and Seattle, the economic downturn has dragged on so long that the question rising from the lips of unemployed IT professionals has become a persistent mantra: When will employers start hiring again?



The surprising answer is that they already have. Just not in any of the traditional IT epicenters.

Instead, as industries such as biotechnology, health care and defense show recession-defying growth, new IT job meccas are springing up in some surprising places better known for things such as country music than coding.

And, perhaps not surprisingly, given the length and depth of the current downturn, increasing numbers of IT professionals are joining other employment-seeking workers in beginning to migrate to these new job centers. In fact, out of 3,000 jobless managers and executives recently surveyed by Chicago-based outplacement company Challenger, Gray & Christmas Inc., 16 percent opted for relocation in the third quarter—a 33 percent increase over the numbers doing so in the second quarter.

One hesitates to call any area a "hot spot" in this economy, but at the very least, these are warm spots. And, considering the current, chilly job market, there's a lot to be said for that.

New York was a tech center long before the dot-com boom—think IBM, Eastman-Kodak Co., Bausch & Lomb Inc. and Corning Inc.—and that tradition hasn't faltered. As New York State CIO James Dillon likes to point out, the state ranked fourth in the nation in 1999 for attracting venture capital—a total of \$2.2 billion—and third for research and development spending by industry, at \$14.1 billion.

Three years later, bolstered by state financial support, the growth of tech business—and IT jobs—is strong, particularly in the so-called Capital Region of upstate New York, a seven-county area that encompasses Albany, Troy and other cities. According to BLS figures, the region has added 3,200 nonfarm and private-sector jobs since September, holding its unemployment rate to a low 3.4 percent.

"One of these days, hopefully soon, we'll need horsepower around the high-speed data mining and processing around the human genome to help [us] figure out sequences to determine West Nile [virus], smallpox, TB, things like that," Ballinger said.

It may be surprising to contemplate so many IT jobs going unfilled in this economic climate. But when they relate to the defense industry, such shortfall claims might be believable, especially when you consider the difficulty employers have getting the security clearances needed for their employees to work on most defense projects. Depending on the level of security clearance in question, background checks can take from 12 to 18 months. The clearance is sponsored by the hiring company, which cannot put IT employees to work until they are cleared.

Southern California—specifically the 28,000-square-mile, three-county so-called Inland Empire that lies east of Los Angeles—is the golden child when it comes to job creation. The Riverside-San Bernardino region has created the most jobs in the country this year to date: 29,700 in July and 26,000 in August, according to the BLS.

What's going on that makes the region so much more robust than much of the rest of the country, particularly its ailing neighbor to the north, Silicon Valley? According to Rohit Shukla, founder, president and CEO of Larta, a think tank for the region's technology businesses formerly known as the Los Angeles Regional Technology Alliance, part of the explanation for the region's health lies in the fact that it's become a major center for distribution.

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