

# WORKFORCE

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number of available hourly jobs is fierce — largely because it's not just teens who are applying for them. Adults and even seniors are going after positions that were once exclusively the bastion of young people. And, thanks once again to today's economic climate; many kids have never needed employment more.

"Things have gotten really competitive," says Michael Serge, a 16-year-old home-schooled student who lives in Vanderbilt Beach. "I've never had a hard time finding a summer job before, but this year it's been impossible."

Michael was living in Tallahassee last summer, and easily found work as a ticket taker at the local movie theatre. He has applied to several mall retailers this year, but to no avail. "My father has been paying me to help him with chores around the house, but it's not the same as having a job," he says, adding that he's still watching the classifieds to try to find more formal work.

## Older workers present competition

Renee Ward, a former corporate recruiter and the founder of [www.Teens4Hire.org](http://www.Teens4Hire.org), one of the largest job-focused Web sites especially for teenagers, says finding work this summer has been a particularly tough for teens, largely because hourly positions that have traditionally been "teen" jobs are now going to "folks who have been laid off from their regular jobs, have depleted their 401Ks or need additional money to pay for prescriptions or medical expenses."

In its "Special Report: Children of the Recession," CBS reported teen unemployment today is at its lowest rate since World War II. The same report revealed that 45 percent of U.S. teens held jobs during the summer of 2000. That number dropped to 33 percent last year, and is expected to drop sharply for 2009.

Sadly, many young job seekers this summer need income not to finance trips to the mall, but to help the family stay afloat.

Last summer, 16-year-old Francisco Rivera of Golden Gate contributed money for groceries and utilities and paid several of his father's medical bills (the family has no health insurance) with money he earned working at a restaurant that has since closed.

So far this summer, Francisco is unemployed. "I've applied to seven or eight places, but I haven't heard back from any of them yet," he says.

Because he's younger than 18, he's not eligible to work in a restaurant that holds a liquor license. Mall retailers, too, have age requirements, mainly because federal laws limit the number of hours younger teens can work per week. Hollister, for example, requires employees to be at least 17. The California-based clothing store Forever 21 requires all of its employees to be a minimum of 18 years of age, in compliance with California law.

Francisco is also limited by the fact that he must be able to walk or ride a bike to work because his family shares one car. "So far, I've been mowing lawns and doing handyman-type jobs, but it's not steady, and I'm not really making very much money," he says.

Another big contributing factor to the slump in teen employment is the downturn in the retail sector of the economy, according to Andrew Sim, director of Northeast University's Center for Labor Market Studies. "Retail stores have long been a traditional venue for teen summer employment," Mr. Sim says. "It's hard to imagine that the slowdown of this sector won't have a significant impact on the teen job outlook."

One bright spot is that many municipalities across the country are aware of the current atmosphere and are taking steps to try to improve things.

The city of Fort Myers launched a special program to provide summer jobs for area youth. The Step Up To Work initiative created 20 jobs within different de-



PEGGY FARREN / FLORIDA WEEKLY

Summer interns take a break for a photo in front of The von Liebig Art Center.



PEGGY FARREN / FLORIDA WEEKLY

Intern Kelsey Schirard at The von Liebig Art Center.



PEGGY FARREN / FLORIDA WEEKLY

Intern Mallory West, center, helps campers Ryan Talano, left, and Cole Mazrah, right.

partments of the city for teens 14 and older. The selected applicants started work on June 9 and will be on the job for a total of 10 weeks, assisting the city's camp counselors, answering phones and the like.

The Fort Myers program was the idea of Michelle Faulkner, staffing manager for the city's Human Resources Department. During a four-day hiring period in late May, nearly 100 teens applied for the 20 positions, she reports.

In addition to local programs, the recently signed 2009 Stimulus Act provides \$12 billion for youth activities, along with creation of millions of jobs for workers 24 years of age and younger. To learn about local jobs for people ages 14-24, visit [www.careeronestop.org](http://www.careeronestop.org) or visit the Career One Stop office at 215 Airport Pulling Road, 436-4301.

## No pay, but worth it

For teens who can afford to be without income, several career builder Web sites suggest that this just might be the perfect summer to consider volunteer work or professional internships for academic credit. "These types of experiences build character, compassion and work ethic and ultimately improve hire-ability later on," says Mr. Sim, who adds that volunteer work and internships allow teens to "try out" careers that they might want to consider in the future.

A number of organizations in Naples offer volunteer opportunities for students to earn their required high school community service hours.

At The von Liebig Art Center in downtown Naples, teen interns 14 and older log 40 hours a week for two-week sessions. Interviews for openings take place in the early spring, and the staff makes its selections in April. Registrar Sheri Chase says student interns assist teachers with classroom activities and help younger campers with their art projects. "The teens are a big help to our staff, and they get a lot of valuable experience," says Chase. She adds the center has 66 interns this summer — a full roster, but no more than usual.

"The kids seem to love their experience here," Ms. Chase says, adding many come

back year after year, or stay on long after the two required weeks because they are having such a great time. "They develop close friendships. It's a wonderful bonding experience."

Christina Miller, an art major and recent graduate of the University of Central Florida, in interning at The von Liebig for the first time this summer. She approached the center in hopes of displaying her artwork; now, as one of the older volunteer interns, she's helping organize the younger teens involved in the summer program. "I love working with the kids," she says.

The Conservancy of Southwest Florida is another option for teen volunteers. JoAnn Johansen, manager of volunteer services for the organization, says teens 16 and older help out at the Conservancy year round.

"We probably have about 500 volunteers in total," Ms. Johansen says. "Of those, roughly 20 percent are teens." They work in a variety of areas, including the Conservancy's wildlife clinic, its Nature Center and its camp and community outreach programs. Teen volunteers receive community service hour credits for the time that they spend at the Conservancy. "A lot of them return every year, even after they head off for college," Ms. Johansen says.

While most experts concur that finding employment might not be easy for teens this summer, they stress that it is not impossible, and they offer the following suggestions for young people hoping to improve their chances.

On her [www.teens4hire.org](http://www.teens4hire.org) site, Ms. Ward advises teens to apply in person, dressed neatly and professionally. "Employers are looking for help that they can count on to be responsible and reliable and to understand the overall needs of their business," she says. "Try to demonstrate these qualities, as well as a strong work ethic, a positive attitude and a willingness to learn new things." Her site also recommends looking for work in places that are likely to see an increase in business over the summer, such as swimming pools, recreational, theme and amusement parks, kids' camps, movie theaters and similar venues.

## Success stories

Despite the overall summer job doldrums, some Naples teens are faring well.

Andrew Fenstermaker landed two jobs to help him raise cash during his last summer before heading off to college. Andrew,

## Helpful Web sites

[www.Teens4Hire.org](http://www.Teens4Hire.org)  
[www.careeronestop.org](http://www.careeronestop.org)  
[www.snagajob.com](http://www.snagajob.com)  
[www.groovejob.com](http://www.groovejob.com)

## Top 10 qualities employers seek in teen applicants

1. Well groomed
2. Good oral and written communication skills
3. Application filled out neatly and completely
4. Basic math, reading comprehension and reasoning skills
5. Ambition
6. Courtesy
7. Trustworthiness
8. Self-motivation
9. Willingness to learn
10. Reliable

Developing and demonstrating the following "soft" skills will also help in the job hunt:

1. Organization — The ability to manage time efficiently and maintain an orderly work area
2. Problem solving — The ability to identify, analyze and solve problems that may arise
3. Teamwork — The ability to work with others and for the good of the employer

Source: [www.teens4hire.org](http://www.teens4hire.org)

whose family resides in Naples but who attended prep school in New Hampshire, is working on the golf course maintenance crew at the Country Club of Naples and is also driving a tram at Moorings Park until he heads off to Franklin Pierce University in New Hampshire in late August.

"I believe I was very lucky," Andrew says about his jobs. "I know there are plenty of kids who are having a really hard time this year." He works early mornings at the golf course and then from 4-7 p.m. at Moorings Park each weekday afternoon. While a basketball scholarship will pay for his tuition at university, he says, "I'm going to need money for books, supplies, and extras, so I'm putting a lot away."

Austin Jennings, a rising senior at Seacrest Country Day School, is returning to the same summer job he's had for the last four years, at a fish-processing plant in Harbor Springs, Mich. His parents were friends with the original owners of the plant, and Austin returns every summer to secure his place.

Several of his friends in Naples are having a difficult time finding summer jobs this year, Austin says. "The economy has been so bad. I think most businesses are doing their best to save money wherever they can."

## Think outside the (job) box

Several of the experts remind teens that the ultimate goal of summer work is to make money, and that finding a job is not the only way to accomplish that.

"There are plenty of ways that kids can hone their entrepreneurial skills and in some cases earn even more money than they would at the hourly minimum wage," Ms. Ward says. Teens and even tweens can babysit, dog walk, run errands for elderly neighbors, tutor younger children, mow and weed lawns, help clean out closets and garages and a variety of other tasks that people are willing to pay for.

Of course, not all teens are looking for jobs this summer.

Naples High School 2009 graduate Bradley Canada is happy to be taking the summer off before starting classes at Rollins College in Winter Park, Fla., in the fall. "I guess I see this as my last summer to spend with my high school friends, our last chance to be free," he says.

If freedom is an option, this is probably a good summer to take it. ■



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