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## State: Nearly one in four teens able to work won't find employment this summer

by RoNeisha Mullen | The Flint Journal

Monday May 12, 2008, 11:11 AM

GENESEE COUNTY - Your teen isn't handing you a line: It really is tough to find a summer job.

In fact, it's harder than it's been in years.

Ask Mark Hammond, 17, a senior at Fenton High School.

He's applied at fast-food places, grocery stores and the like for the past few years. No luck.

His parents are impatient; they only allow him to drive a family car with permission, since he doesn't have money for gasoline and insurance.

Things aren't looking any brighter for 2008.

"The applications ask for previous job experience, and I can't put anything down because no one's ever given me a chance," said Mark, who will start college this fall. "It's frustrating because I've never had the chance to show my work ethic or that I'm a hard worker."

His mother, Laura Hammond, agreed. "It is frustrating because he's applied to so many places, and he's never received so much as a call back," she said.

"We provide him with the necessities, but where do you draw the line? He needs to be earning his own spending money."

This is shaping up to be a summer of discontent for many young people who want to be in the labor force, not to mention the parents who want it just as badly.

Nearly one-quarter of all Michigan teens available to work will be unemployed this summer, according to a report released last week by the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth.

That adds up to 74,000 teens with lots of time on their hands, much to the chagrin of moms and dads.

"The teen market is going to be more competitive than it's been in recent years," said Jeff Aula, an economic analyst for the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth. "Not only are there fewer companies hiring, but there's more competition."

This isn't just the case for Michigan teens. It's happening throughout the country.

Nationally, the number of teens with jobs fell about half a percentage point last year, said Joseph McLaughlin, a research associate at the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University in Boston.

A report McLaughlin co-authored for the center shows that since 2000, the teen employment rate has dropped from about 45.2 percent in 2000 to a forecasted 33.5 percent this year.

In human terms, if the rate remained at 45 percent, nearly 2 million more teens would be working.

"Last year was a 60-year low for the

#### Teen job market by the numbers

- 317,600: Number of Michigan teens available to work this summer.
- 243,600: Number that will get jobs.
- 23.3 percent: The teen unemployment rate forecast for Michigan this summer.
- 22 percent: Last year's rate. That means a projected 3,000 more Michigan teens will be jobless this summer.

Source: Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth

#### Job-hunting tips

Summer is almost here, and if your parents are in your ear about getting a job, don't fret yet: There still are jobs to be found. Keep these tips in mind as you search:

- Dress and speak

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market, and this year is expected to be even lower," McLaughlin said.

One problem might be the way teens go about looking for work.

Austin Lavin knew that teens were confused about the job-hunting process after his teenage sister came to him with questions about how to get her first job.

"There are a lot of teenagers looking for jobs, but they don't know how to start the process," Lavin said. "We wanted to teach kids how to do it."

The 23-year-old from Philadelphia, Pa. - along with his 17-year-old sister, Celeste - developed [www.myfirstpaycheck.com](http://www.myfirstpaycheck.com), which is focused on teaching teens how to apply for jobs.

With tools such as resume builders, tips for writing cover letters and links to government sites with information about employment laws and tax documents, the site is aimed at helping teenagers prepare for job hunting, applying for jobs and interviewing.

Launched last fall, Lavin said the site is growing quickly. Plans for a national jobs board are in the works.

"There's still jobs out there," Lavin said. "You have to make sure your application is put together, that you're persistent and creative when you go out there."

At least teens in Genesee County may have an advantage over those in other counties, said Rhetta Hunyady, program manager for the Summer Youth Initiative.

This summer, about 450 Genesee County teens will receive summer jobs through the program, which is funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. The program pays teens to work at nonprofit agencies and local businesses, performing general office duties, landscaping and running day camps.

They work for 10 weeks and earn minimum wage. About 733 students applied for the positions by the late-April deadline.

"I think the market is pretty good for our teens. I don't know another county that has a program like SYI," Hunyady said. "We're giving our students the opportunity for free job training and early preparation, which is key for success at work and at home."

Those without such programs to rely on are getting some real-world lessons in competition. Teens throughout the country are competing more heavily for jobs against three key groups, McLaughlin said: people 55 and older, college students and immigrants.

"Older people are getting part-time jobs to help supplement their fixed income or simply to have something to do, and the college students who aren't in career jobs yet are holding on to jobs they held in previous summers - not to mention they're out of school earlier, so they can start working sooner than the high school kids," McLaughlin said.

"Immigrants are taking over in summer construction jobs and inner-city fast-food restaurants."

East Lansing-based consultant Scott Watkins sees similar trends in Michigan.

"The high unemployment rate has left many people seeking jobs they're overqualified for," said Watkins, who's with Anderson Economic Group, an economic consulting company.

"So a lot of positions that teenagers and young or inexperienced people usually fill are now filled by people who have lost higher-level positions and are willing to take any job available."

Add in the fact that Genesee County's overall unemployment rate continues to exceed other areas, and it's not a pretty picture for local teens.

"At first I thought it was because I didn't have a license or reliable transportation," said Carissa Heath, 17, of Swartz Creek. "But now I have a license and a car to drive, but I still can't get a job."

Like Mark, Carissa has been trying to get a job for the past three summers. About six months ago, she applied at every fast-food spot near her house and said she hasn't received so much as a call from any of them.

professionally.

- Turn in your job application to a manager.
- Be familiar with the operations of the company.
- Go alone. Don't bring a friend to steal the spotlight.
- Go to places where people know you or places you visit often.
- Ask friends and relatives about openings at the companies where they work.
- Know what your references will say about you before you list them on an application.
- Use academic achievements and volunteer work to make up for a lack of professional experience.
- Consider self-employment: baby-sitting, mowing lawns or tutoring.
- Visit [www.myfirstpaycheck.com](http://www.myfirstpaycheck.com) for more tips.

*Sources: Center for Labor and Market Studies; Anderson Economic Group; Genesee Regional Chamber of Commerce; Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth*

"Those applications are expired now, so I'm just going to apply again," Heath said. "My mom pays for my gas, and I can only drive if I'm going to school or to look for a job. I have to get a job." Larry Schlusler, 18, knows that jobs for teens are scarce.

That's why he jumped at an offer to be assistant manager at Journey's Kids at the Genesee Valley Center, despite the fact it's more than 40 miles from his home in Howell.

"I almost went to Spain to work as a waiter because the market is so stiff," said Schlusler, who will enter his sophomore year at Alma College this fall. "Making the drive beats trying to find another job or not having one at all."

The tight teen job market has a big impact on parents struggling with their own labor issues.

Donna Dunkling, a substitute teacher from Flint Township, said her 16-year-old daughter, Ashley Hill, hasn't been able to get a job since she was in a summer employment program two years ago.

"It's frustrating with the economy being the way it is," Dunkling said. "I want her to have a job so she can help out."

Dunkling, who works only when school is in session, said the family is on a strict budget.

"When things got bad last year, I started planning for this year so that I could make my money stretch to cover the two months that I'm off," she said. "If Ashley had a job, she'd be able to buy some of the things she depends on me for."

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Posted by **smc1964** on [05/12/08 at 12:19PM](#)

This is all wrong. Those kids who don't find jobs aren't looking or being very picky about what type of work they want to work. I know of plenty of businesses who are begging for workers who will show up on time and do a good job. The problem as I see it is that the really good paying jobs are difficult to find, not the service industry jobs. Maybe these kids need to learn how to perform hard work and not to be lazy.

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Posted by **HugeADummy** on [05/12/08 at 12:49PM](#)

smc1964...

And what experience do you have to say this is wrong? What is your statistics based on to disagree with the author?

My sense tells me the author is spot on...I know quite a few teens having a VERY hard time getting a job...and no...these kids are NOT lazy. And yes, they are very frustrated with the sparse employment opportunities.

I know one teen who cuts yards for only \$10-20 a yard(depending on size)...and some of his customers said they cannot afford it this year with the economy.

Additionally, unemployment figures seem quite high...so the adults that need a job are taking the summer jobs normally for kids...thus the kids are left out.

I don't know what you have been hearing...but I hear the US, and especially Michigan has a TERRIBLE economy. Employers seem to be running at bare minimum levels to keep in business. This is normal for bad economies...employers cut back workforce and jobs are harder to find.

This story does not surprise me.

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Posted by **Bus3** on [05/12/08 at 12:51PM](#)

Everyone misses the main thing...When the minimum wage rose, it priced these kids out of the market. I own a business and we cannot afford to have someone with no experience earning \$6.08 or \$7.15. The truth is, some of these kids and jobs are not worth that. We have to have people ready to go if they are earning that. We have cut back on employees and the ones working just have to make up for the work that others would have done. The argument was "How can you raise a family of four on the minimum wage?" The reply is, the minimum wage wasn't meant to be a living wage, so you shouldn't be raising a family of four on it. Does anyone else find it a coincidence that Michigan's economy started tanking around the same time the min. wage rose

two years ago? Small businesses (pizza shops, McDonald's, etc.) are the backbone of our economy, we're the ones that employ kids and adults in the community and now we're getting killed. I'm sorry, \$7.15 to wash dishes is just too much but the state mandates that's what we have to pay. The other people getting screwed are the really great teenage employees that are worth \$10 an hour to our business but since we have to pay the worst employees so much, they can't get what they're worth. All the minimum wage does is hurt good employees and businesses. Wake up people. The market should set prices, not the government!

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Posted by **WestMichBZ** on [05/12/08 at 1:30PM](#)

Bus3,

McDonalds is not considered a small business...by any means so don't cry "franchise."

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Posted by **Bus3** on [05/12/08 at 1:38PM](#)

"McDonalds is not considered a small business"

Most McDonalds are owned by independent owners and not by McDonalds corporation. These independent owners struggle just as every other small business owner does. No business can absorb a 45% increase in payroll, which is what the minimum wage did, and not struggle with it. This then leads to inflation because we have to raise prices to offset it.

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Posted by **paola01** on [05/12/08 at 2:06PM](#)

Wow Bus,

\$7.15/hr too much to wash dishes?? Geez, what do you want, slave labor? If indeed minimum wage jobs are the backbone of our economy, then we should all fear for our future. Sounds to me like you're just a cheap business owner who doesn't want pay what is already a ridiculously low wage. The minimum wage didn't go up for 10 years! Yet those who hired them raised their prices by at least inflation. Since you hire minimum wage employees, did you too not take a pay increase for those 10 years? You're either a cheap employer, or in the wrong business if you can't afford to pay your employees minimum wage.

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