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## More temp hires point to recovery

### But some report problems finding workers because of state's unemployment benefits

by Kevin James Shay | Staff Writer

Temp agencies in Maryland are placing more workers in jobs than a year ago, but that has led to a problem for the agencies: Finding enough people who want to get off unemployment benefits and work.

It might seem paradoxical at a time when Maryland's unemployment rate was 7.7 percent as of March, but Wanda L. Smith, president of Symphony Placements in Timonium — a full-service staffing company — and president of the Maryland Staffing Association, said she has heard from numerous temp agencies in the state who, like hers, have jobs available but are scrambling to find willing workers.

"With the federal extensions, people on unemployment can get 99 weeks of benefits in Maryland," Smith said. "Some people say they don't want to mess up their unemployment benefits, so they don't take jobs that we have open. People know how to use the system. ... We need an overhaul of the state of Maryland's unemployment benefits system."

With federal help, jobless workers today can collect checks longer than at any time since the benefits program started decades ago. More than half the states and Washington, D.C., offer 99 weeks of benefits, with Nebraska, South Dakota and North Dakota providing the shortest period — 60 weeks, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

Temporary help services employment across the U.S. rose by a seasonally adjusted 2 percent from March to April, according to federal figures released earlier this month. Unadjusted figures showed an even larger gain of 3.6 percent in that month, with a 14.6 percent jump from a year ago.

In Maryland, employment services jobs rose by a seasonally adjusted 8.2 percent in March from February, according to the state Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation. That was a higher gain than in most industries, including health care and technical services jobs. State figures for April are due out today.

Temp employment can be a key economic indicator, often a precursor to job gains in other industries, staffing officials say.

"Business is turning around," Smith said. "A lot of my competitors are very happy since they are getting busier. We are more optimistic than we were last year."

Still, businesses remain cautious about adding too many permanent workers too soon, said Richard Wahlquist, president and CEO of the American Staffing Association in Alexandria, Va.

Public staffing companies are seeing stronger bottom line results from a year ago. Manpower of Milwaukee, which has numerous offices in Maryland, reported its first-quarter revenue rose 13 percent to \$4.1 billion from a year ago. Net earnings were \$2.8 million, compared with a net loss of \$1.8 million a year earlier.

An index from the national staffing association that charts temp employment has shown continued gains in April, with the national level 21 percent higher during the week ending May 2 from the corresponding week in 2009.

The health care industry continues to see a lot of openings at temp agencies, while other sectors such as administrative, clerical and light industrial are picking up, Smith said.