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Work prospects rise for college grads in Michigan

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Jennifer Youssef / The Detroit News

A year ago, the Farbman Group, a commercial real estate services company, hired just one recent college graduate.

This summer, the Southfield firm plans to hire three, possibly four. That's good news not only for degreed job seekers, but also for the state, which has suffered a brain-drain in recent years because good jobs were scarce for new graduates.

"We see some positive signs, some potential that there's stabilization in Michigan's economy," said Farbman Group CFO Andy Gutman. "We'll hire one or two more (grads) in the next 90 days."

The tight employment market is easing and experts predict more graduates will land jobs this summer. Nationwide, employers plan to make 5 percent more job offers, compared to last year, when they were down 20 percent, according to a study by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, which tracks recruitment data. Job hires are up 4 percent from 2009.

Michigan employers are lagging behind the nation, with many companies striving to get their bearings after the long recession. But hiring is expected to pick up this year as the economy improves.

"(Hiring) is definitely going to be much better for students nationally, but it's still going to be a challenge," said Don Grimes, an economist at the University of Michigan's Institute for Research on Labor, Employment and the Economy. "Michigan employers may be slower to hire because they're still shell-shocked."

December graduates will have a much better chance of finding employment in the Great Lakes State, he said.

As students were graduating, some Michigan colleges noticed an influx of prospective employers visiting campuses.

"We have (had) some rippling of activity," said Phil Gardner, director of research for the Collegiate Employment Research Institute at Michigan State University.

Padmaja Rao, assistant director of career services at Wayne State University, said more companies were showing interest in hiring graduates for full-time and part-time jobs, as well as for paid and unpaid internships.

Among the companies looking to hire is Hall Financial, a Birmingham-based mortgage and loan company.

The firm plans to hire five to 10 graduates this year to fill positions in sales, operations and other areas, said David Hall, founder. He said he likes to hire young workers because they tend to be open to new ideas he can teach them about the business.

"I'm always looking for people who are eager and hungry and excited to make a difference," Hall said.

Meghan Miller was lucky enough to start work as a sales analyst, just three days after graduating from MSU with a degree in advertising.

She did her homework, though. She started job hunting in December and applied for 79 jobs before being hired by Oliver-Tolas Healthcare Packaging in Grand Rapids.

"I feel fortunate I have a job," she said. "Everything came together at the last minute. I'm so relieved."

Knowing the job market was tough, Patrick Goulet of Canton Township started looking last fall.

The 21-year-old formed a network of friends and public relations professionals, looked on career websites and job shadowed during his senior year at MSU.

His diligence paid off when he landed a paid internship at an Internet promotions company in Chicago, with the possibility of permanent employment.

"I feel very lucky," he said. "I know a lot of people who graduated two years ago and they're still looking for a job."

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