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## Survey Shows Upbeat Employment Outlook

**Manpower Associates report: Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk are third best in nation**

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Area job seekers may have more than warmer weather to look forward to this spring.

A recent report by Manpower Associates rates the Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk area's employment outlook for this year's second quarter as the third best in the nation, behind Kentucky's Lexington-Fayette area and South Carolina's Greenville-Mauldin-Easley region.

From April to June, 17 percent of the companies interviewed plan to hire more employees, while 1 percent expect to cut staff, according to the Manpower Employment Outlook Survey. Another 75 percent expect to maintain their current staff levels and 6 percent are not certain of their hiring plans, the survey by Milwaukee-based staffing firm with 800 offices in the United States and Puerto Rico states.

"With the new year, companies seem to be putting themselves out there more, by assessing their current talent pool and looking at staffing as a way to improve their business after a tough economy the past two years," said Joslyn Gadwah, manager of the Stamford office of Milwaukee-based Manpower, which has 800 locations in the United States and Puerto Rico. "Whereas they may have felt constricted for a long time, there seems to be a natural upswing and interest in hiring taking place."

Seven percent of area employers planned to hire more workers a year ago, while 5 percent expected to increase their staffs during this quarter, according to the Manpower survey, which polled 143 businesses throughout coastal Fairfield County.

Unemployment numbers released Friday from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics show the national unemployment rate below 9 percent for the first time since 2008.

Sectors where job prospects appear best include construction, wholesale and retail trade, financial services, education and health services, leisure and hospitality and government, according to the survey. Employers in information plan to reduce staffing levels, while non-durable goods manufacturers report no change in hiring sentiment.

Of the more than 18,000 employers surveyed in the United States, 8 percent anticipate an increase in staff levels for this year's second quarter, while 74 percent expect no change in their hiring plans and 4 percent are undecided.

The next Manpower Employment Outlook Survey will be released on June 14 to report hiring expectations for this year's third quarter.

The regional and national employment outlook should continue to improve with the economy as long as the disruption to Middle East oil production as a result of Libya's political unrest ends soon, said Edward Deak, an economic professor at Fairfield University.

"If you see this running into the end of spring and beginning of summer, then we could have some problems," he said.

David Lewis, president of Stamford-based human resources consulting firm OperationsInc, agreed.

"It seems every corner we turn, we find a reason to be less confident," he said.