

## BIZfact

5,700

Number of retail jobs added on Long Island in the past 12 months

Source: State Department of Labor; August 2014 compared to August 2013

## UNEMPLOYMENT UP IN 24 STATES

Unemployment rates rose in nearly half of the states in August, even as employers in two-thirds of the states added jobs.

The U.S. Labor Department says unemployment increased in 24 states, fell in 15 and was unchanged in 11. Hiring picked up in 35 states, while it fell in 15.

Unemployment rates can rise even when hiring increases if more people start looking for work and don't immediately find jobs.

Georgia's unemployment rate jumped to 8.1 percent from 7.7 percent in July; it was the highest among all the states. It was followed by Mississippi at 7.9 percent. That's the first time Georgia has had the highest rate since the Great Recession ended. Previously, Nevada, Michigan and Rhode Island have had the highest.

New York State's unemployment rate was 6.4 percent, down from 6.6 percent in July.

The national unemployment rate dipped to 6.1 percent in August, from 6.2 percent the previous month. Employers added 142,000 jobs, below an average of 212,000 in the previous 12 months.

North Dakota had the lowest unemployment rate in the nation, as it has for many years, at 2.8 percent. The state is benefiting from an oil and gas drilling boom. It was followed by three states with 3.6 percent unemployment: Nebraska, South Dakota and Utah. — AP

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# Training and gaining

College program for upgrading skills aids Hicksville firm

BY VIRGINIA MUNGER KAHN  
Special to Newsday

Four years ago, EM & EM Chimney in Hicksville was a residential chimney and masonry repair company with 12 employees. Today, driven by the conversion of commercial buildings in New York City to natural gas and lighter fuel oil, EM & EM employs 48 people and its main business is relining and refurbishing commercial chimneys in the city.

"Our business has flipped," said Elyse Guanti, operations manager and the driver behind the company's growth. "The commercial business is a completely different animal. What we do now is much more difficult."

That more demanding business environment presented Guanti with a major training challenge earlier this year. In March a prospective customer — a building management company — asked EM & EM to make sure the welder on site be certified by the American Welding Society. At the time, though many of EM & EM's welders had several years' experience, only two were certified. Guanti realized that if one company asked for AWS certification, others would not be far behind. "I decided it was imperative we have certified welders throughout our crews," she said.

## New strategy needed

The challenge was finding a way to upgrade her welders' skills without hurting her business. If she took them off the job to get training, she'd lose business, because she wouldn't have enough welders to fill her nine four-man crews.

EM & EM's challenge is not unusual, especially for companies in the manufacturing and industrial sectors. Finding workers with the right skills for today's manufacturing jobs is extremely difficult, noted Keith Campbell, editor of the Manufacturing Workforce Development Playbook, which covers strategies for closing the skills gap. Two years ago, a Deloitte LLP study found 600,000 manu-



Elyse Guanti, operations manager of EM & EM Chimney and Masonry Repair, with recently certified welders: front row from left, Matt Ramos, Erick Osorio, Steve Baker; second row, Shane Spinelli, Tom Smith and Jeff Ramos; and third row, David Verbeeck and John Vaccarello.

facturing jobs nationwide were going unfilled because companies could not find workers with appropriate skills.

Only very large companies have resources to set up internal training programs, Campbell said. Some ask vendors to train their workers, but that's a short-term fix. Many end up sending workers to distant training institutes. That was the alternative Guanti faced: sending her welders to a trade school in Ohio.

That option raised numerous problems. First, she could not send all her welders at once without decimating her crews. Not only would she have to pay tuition, she'd have to pay room and board plus airfare. She figured it would cost at least \$50,000. "I was really stressed out about it," she said.

Finally, in April she turned to Sylvia Diaz, interim executive director of the Suffolk County Community College Foundation, which raises money for student scholarships. Guanti had worked with her on a fundraiser. She asked Diaz if there were any programs at the college that could help. Within 24 hours Diaz told her, "We can make this happen."

Six years ago, SCCC had developed a welding program

and received approval as a remote testing facility for AWS certification. It was one of several manufacturing training programs launched in 2006 with a \$2.5 million federal grant. "When I started in 2005, I realized the college was surrounded by manufacturing companies and we weren't working with them," college president Shaun McKay said.

## Filling the skills gap

Today, SCCC's Advanced Manufacturing and Corporate Training Center in Brentwood offers courses on subjects from business leadership to lathe and mill programming. "Our goal is to stay abreast of skill gaps and deliver on industry needs," said John Lombardo, associate vice president for workforce and economic development. "When it comes to manufacturing, we are unique in the region."

The college worked with Guanti to devise a schedule that allowed her workers to stay on the job. The program ran for four weeks in July, with workers attending class four hours a night, four days a week. When the certification results were in, all 10 workers had passed the first test, and nine had passed the second. Total cost of the program,

## AT A GLANCE

### Name

EM & EM Chimney and Masonry Repair Inc., Hicksville

### Operations manager

Elyse Guanti

### Established

2002

### Employees

48

### Annual revenues

\$6.8 million

which EM & EM picked up, was about \$20,000.

A few weeks ago, EM & EM got the job from the management company that had asked about certification. "I am very grateful to Suffolk [County] Community College," Guanti said. "I had no idea community colleges do this sort of thing."

When it comes to training workers, local businesses should "look in our own backyard," she said. "The education is here for the taking."