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## Workforce office says job seekers optimistic

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Job seekers aren't walking into the Workforce Solutions' office in Katy Mills mall with a dour or hostile countenance.

They're confident that they will find what they're looking for, even if the numbers are only slightly more encouraging than they were two months ago.

"It depends on how long they've been looking, but most are optimistic," services coordinator Jim Ashlock said. "I guess it's a trait for a lot of people.

"There are those who are kind of overwhelmed at times, but most come in with a great attitude. They're concerned, but we explain that looking for a job is kind of like a job. So we try to encourage them to stay focused on it and continue in their search."

The Houston metropolitan area unemployment rate in May was 8.3 percent — down one-tenth of a percentage point from April — according to Workforce Solutions labor market analyst Joel Wagher. That's well below the current national rate of 9.5 percent, but slightly above the state rate of 8 percent.

Wagher said there were 22,000 more jobs in the Houston metro area in May than there were in April, but 40 percent of the gain was due to temporary census workers added. There are still 240,963 unemployed, and the past two years have seen 84,800 jobs lost.

"We're not seeing as many layoffs as we did last year or the year before," he said. "We're not losing many jobs, but we're not putting on enough to accommodate everybody who has lost jobs or those coming in to look for jobs — your people who have finished college or high school or those who retired, and their portfolios have dropped due to the economy and they can't live on investments."

Said Ashlock, "The market is still very soft. Nothing is happening fast. We've seen a few more of the job seekers getting jobs, but it's not anything that is running wild right now."

The good news is that they're being served efficiently at the 1,800-square-foot Workforce Solutions office at Katy Mills — which was not the case a year ago.

The former Workforce Solutions office, located at the Houston Community College Northwest campus at Interstate 10 and Park Row, was shut down. U.S. Department of Labor funds were allocated to other states with higher unemployment, forcing the Gulf Coast Workforce Board to consolidate and close some of its offices, taking the total number of offices within its 13-county territory from 35 to 29, according to Sue Cruver, Workforce Solutions marketing coordinator. The former Katy office was consolidated with the Spring Branch office.

That's when a coalition stepped in, consisting of: Lance LaCour, president and CEO of the Katy Area Economic Development Council; Ann Hodge, president and CEO of the Katy Area Chamber of Commerce; State Sen. Glenn Hegar, R-Katy; State Sen. Dan Patrick, R-Houston; State Rep. Bill Callegari, R-Katy; and state Rep. John Zerwas, R-Richmond.

Full Article: <http://www.ultimatekaty.com/2010/07/workforce-office-says-job-seekers-optimistic>