

HOLIDAYS

2017 Holiday Hiring Could Be a Boon for Seasonal Workers

NewsUSA

(NU) - Let the holiday hiring season begin.

Early forecasts anticipate a pretty holly, jolly Christmas for retailers, with total sales expected to grow as much as 4.5 percent as opposed to last year's 3.6 percent. To help get them across the finish line, according to the National Retail Federation, a whopping 500,000 to 550,000 seasonal workers – more than the population of Sacramento, California – will need to be hired.

And while some companies are making it more attractive than ever to come aboard, there's still some forces at work that applicants need to be aware of:

- **The economy isn't necessarily your friend.** Rather than bringing in hordes of new temps as in the past to do everything from wait on customers to gift wrap presents, some employers like Walmart are instead at least mainly opting to offer existing workers extra hours. "Part of the reason is that there just aren't as many people looking for work this year," CNNMoney.com reports. "Unemployment fell to a 16-year-low of 4.2 percent in September, considered to be pretty much full employment by most economists."

- **Except when it is your friend.** Because there are fewer people out of work – heck, even the number of part-time workers who'd prefer full-time gigs has fallen by nearly 250,000 in the last year – some of the incentives being dangled to lure qualified applicants are pretty impressive.

One of the most intriguing offers comes from UPS (UPS.Jobs.com), currently in the midst of a major push to fill about 95,000 full- and part-time jobs – primarily as package handlers, drivers, and driver-helpers. The company already has a reputation for providing such seasonal temps what it calls "a road to permanent employment" (more on that in a second). And that's on top of inducements including flexible hours across multiple shifts and – are you ready? – as much as \$25,000 in tuition assistance for permanent part-time college students through its Earn and Learn program.

"If you are a student, a working mom, or just looking to make extra money for the holidays, we have a job for you," says CEO David Abney.



Billions of packages will need to be delivered during the holiday season.

- **The 800-pound gorilla.** Aside from some island castaway, who isn't buying online these days? And with internet sales predicted to rise 18 to 21 percent over last year, not only does someone have to deliver those packages (see UPS above), but stores like Macy's will be needing bodies for their fulfillment centers and online customer service.

So what are the odds of those 500,000-plus temp gigs turning into something more lasting?

Well, as Benjamin Franklin once opined, the only guarantees in life are death and taxes. But UPS, for example, does say that 35 percent of those hired for seasonal package handler jobs over the past three years subsequently landed permanent positions, and that even its permanent part-time employees qualify for healthcare and retirement benefits.

Case in point of how the package delivery company makes it possible to rise through the ranks: Jackie Nicholas, who started out years ago as a temp and who's now a full-time recruiter in Kentucky.

"As a mother, the great pay and benefits have been critical for my family, and so has the flexibility," says Nicholas, recalling how she used to work the night shift when her two kids were young so that she could be with them for things like school field trips.

Oh, and her husband and both her sons now also work for UPS.