

TRENDLINES

The North Country Economic Newsletter

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Local News

Georgia-Pacific will lay off about 70 employees in mid-January. The layoffs will be indefinite. (Source: PressRepublican)

Green Corridor – an agreement between the Plattsburgh-North Country Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Quebec Chambers of Commerce to create a Quebec–New York Green Corridor Council will lead to new ways to expand trade. (Source: The PressRepublican)

Noble Environmental Power is moving forward with an application for a 13-turbine wind park in Chateaugay. (Source: NYS Department of Labor)

Hacketts, a local department store chain, plans to open a new store in Lake Placid. The new store is expected to open in spring 2009. (Source: NYS Department of Labor)

North Country Community College announced a \$56 million expansion and renovation project. (Source: NYS Department of Labor)

The American Management Association will lay off 13 workers at its facility in Saranac Lake. (Source: NYS Department of Labor)

A fire destroyed the **Comfort Inn, fitness center, sports bar, and Perkins restaurant** in Plattsburgh (Clinton County) which employs about 200 workers. (Source: NYS Department of Labor)

Results of the Study of Young Professionals in New York's Clinton, Franklin, Essex, and Hamilton Counties

The Study was conducted by the Technical Assistance Center (TAC) at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh for the North Country Workforce Investment Board (WIB). The results are reprinted with the permission of Keri Mack, Director of Special Projects at the Workforce Investment Board (WIB).

The Study looks at the lifestyle and professional attitudes and choices of young professionals. A “young professional,” is defined for the purposes of this study, as a person between 20 and 44 years of age who is following a career path.*

Survey Results

- 54% of the respondents stated that they either plan to stay permanently in the region, or for at least nine years.
- 75% of respondents stated that they were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their current jobs.

- 58% of respondents stated that they were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the community outside of their professional life.

- Regional young professionals ranked pay scale of jobs, educational opportunities, and number of jobs available as their top priorities in the area of economic/professional opportunities.

- Educational opportunities, professional development, and networking opportunities were rated as being most positive in this area. The variety of jobs, number of jobs, and pay scale of jobs were given the least favorable impression.

- The most important lifestyle opportunities for young professionals surveyed are recreational opportunities, community involvement/volunteer opportunities, arts and cultural opportunities, social gathering spots, and community identity and image.

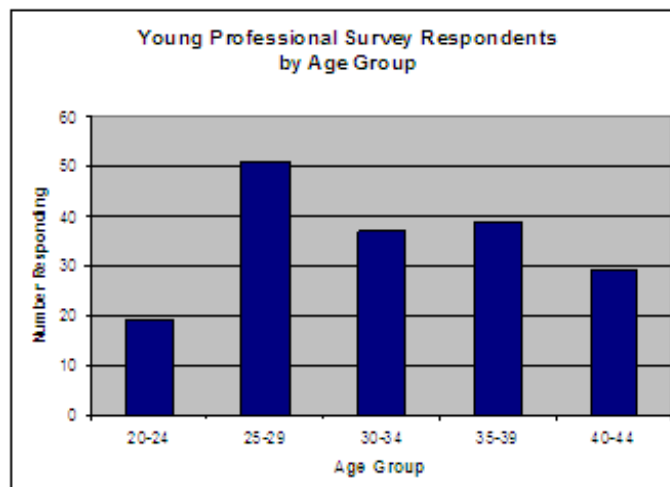


- Of the preceding highly ranked lifestyle opportunities, respondents stated that recreational opportunities, community involvement/volunteer opportunities and community identity and image were generally well-provided for in the area. Social gathering spots and arts and cultural opportunities scored as “fair” or “poor” by nearly three-quarters of respondents.

Focus Group Results

- Responses differed between participants in Clinton County and those from Franklin/Essex County. Those from the latter group generally expressed greater career and social challenges.

- Concerns about employers within the focus groups included pay levels and benefits, and also that employers should encourage strong morale among productive employees through positive feedback and incentives such as extra leave time or flexible work schedules.



*A career path is defined as a planned, logical progression of jobs within one or more professions throughout one's working life.

- The quality of life and variety of recreational opportunities were cited as a main reason for young professionals deciding to live and stay in the area in the focus groups. Being near family was a secondary reason discussed. Clinton County participants expressed concern with a lack of family activities and arts and cultural opportunities. Franklin/Essex County participants stated that there were few gathering spots for singles, and few upscale restaurants.

- Participants lauded the opportunities for community involvement and volunteer activities in the region but stated that they could be better publicized for newcomers.

- Young professionals stated that the region has good ma-

terial on which to build an identity, and image campaigns should be well thought out and comprehensively implemented.

- Focus group participants expressed concern with lack of cultural diversity in the region, with the exception of a few larger employers.

- In contrast to the survey results, a majority of the Franklin/Essex County focus group participants expected to leave in five years.

Demographic Information Study Results:

- 66,590 individuals fall into the study age group, or 38.2% of the area's total population. This compares to 37.3% statewide.

- The estimated number of young professionals participa-

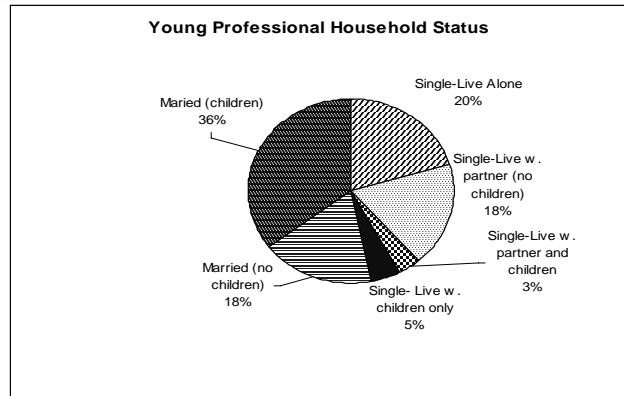
ting in the regional workforce is 49,277.

- Federal statistics show an anticipated growth in the U. S. labor force of only 0.6% between 2005 and 2050; national demand for workforce between 2006 - 2016 is projected to increase 10%.

- New York State Department of Labor projects a statewide increase in demand for workforce

between 2004 - 2014 at 7.4%, and in the North Country region, an increase in demand for workforce at 7.3%.

- Significant interest and good participation in the study indicates a need for continued research e.g. a marketing plan to attract and retain young professionals, and resurveying in three years.



Featured Economic Indicators for the Tri-County Area (Clinton, Essex, and Franklin Counties)

Clinton County

Employment Growth (NSA)	2006	2007	Q3 2007 YTD	Q3 2008 YTD
	0.1%	-0.9%	-0.9%	-0.3%
Unemployment Rate	Q4 2007	Q1 2008	Q2 2008	Q3 2008
	4.9%	6.9%	6.2%	6.4%
Personal Bankruptcy Failing Rate	2005	2006	2007	Rank in NY
Per 1000, Chapters 7&13	5.44	1.88	2.13	41
Total Housing permits	Q4 2007	Q1 2008	Q2 2008	Q3 2008
Single Family Housing	38	1	9	17
Multi Family Housing	30	0	2	7

Essex County

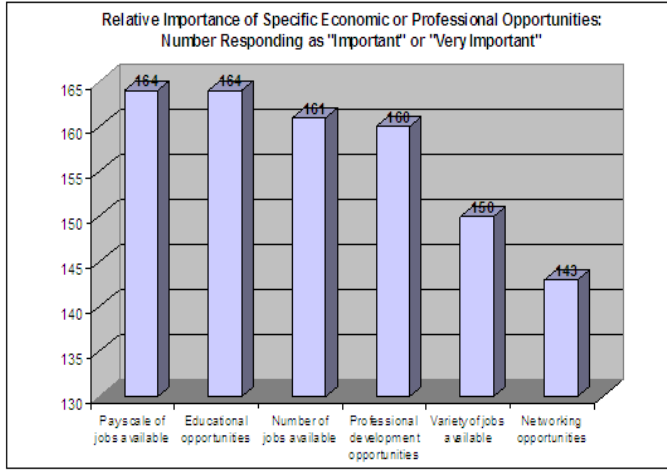
Employment Growth	2006	2007	Q3 2007 YTD	Q3 2008 YTD
	-0.4%	-0.5%	-0.5%	-0.1%
Unemployment Rate	Q4 2007	Q1 2008	Q2 2008	Q3 2008
	5.5%	7.9%	6.3%	5.3%
Personal Bankruptcy Failing Rate	2005	2006	2007	Rank in NY
Per 1000, Chapters 7&13	4.59	1.41	1.47	54
Total Housing permits	Q4 2007	Q1 2008	Q2 2008	Q3 2008
Single Family Housing	na	na	na	na
Multi Family Housing	na	na	na	na

Franklin County

Employment Growth	2006	2007	Q3 2007 YTD	Q3 2008 YTD
	0.8%	0.4%	0.6%	0.7%
Unemployment Rate	Q4 2007	Q1 2008	Q2 2008	Q3 2008
	5.6%	7.8%	6.6%	6.2%
Personal Bankruptcy Failing Rate	2005	2006	2007	Rank in NY
Per 1000, Chapters 7&13	4.50	1.84	4.52	5
Total Housing permits	Q4 2007	Q1 2008	Q2 2008	Q3 2008
Single Family Housing	22	4	8	11
Multi Family Housing	0	0	0	0

Quarterly Data is the year-to-date percentage change from the previous year's YTD data

Source: Regional Economic Conditions Reported by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC)



Focus Group Overview:

Two focus groups were held to gather qualitative anecdotal information from young professionals representing different age, gender, ethnic, and occupational groups. The first focus group was held March 11, 2008 in Plattsburgh, with Clinton County young professionals. The second focus group was held March 13, 2008 in Saranac Lake, to obtain this information from Franklin and Essex County young professionals. Eighteen individuals participated (8 in Plattsburgh and 10 in Saranac Lake).

Discussion Topic: Economic/ Job Opportunities

The discussion first looked at impressions of the economic and job opportunities in the area for young professionals. Generally, the Clinton County participants provided more positive feedback about these opportunities than those from Franklin or Essex Counties. Clinton County participants identified as positive economic opportunities the proximity and potential of Montreal business markets, redevelopment of the former Plattsburgh Air Force Base, the opening of new retail establishments and businesses, tourism growth through activities such as fishing tournaments, and a growing, organized, young professional base. One criticism was the perception that local economic developers focus perhaps too much on attracting

Canadian businesses, and do not spend enough time to develop local business opportunities or those that are not Canadian-based. The feedback on whether the community was headed in the right direction economically was mainly positive, with most participants agreeing with this statement, although a majority was hesitant in their agreement. One-quarter disagreed with the statement.

Franklin and Essex County participants stated that the economic and job positives for their region include a "resilient economy" that is used to working with "narrow margins", an influx of people interested in small town living post 9/11, and residents who are protective of the lifestyle of the area. The negatives expressed included: difficulties in finding jobs or jobs for a spouse or partner, little upward mobility, the need to commute great distances, high costs of living including very high taxes and heating costs, geographic isolation, lower pay than typical in most fields, and a limited workforce. When asked about whether the community was headed in the right direction economically, the feedback was quite mixed, with a slightly higher percentage of negative responses.

Discussion Topic: Employers

Clinton County young professionals gave overall mostly positive messages about employers meeting their needs.

Main concerns expressed were that most companies had limited opportunities for growth, too many also had low pay and/or few benefits, and that providing positive feedback and boosting employee morale was not a high enough priority. This focus group suggested that employers retain their good employees by using creative incentives other than pay increases, such as extra time off, flexible work schedules and providing positive messages of appreciation for work well done.

Essex and Franklin County young professionals stated that area employers generally do not pay enough or provide sufficient benefits; however they stated that there are notable exceptions. Lack of health insurance was cited as a significant concern although the group recognized that this is not specific to this region.

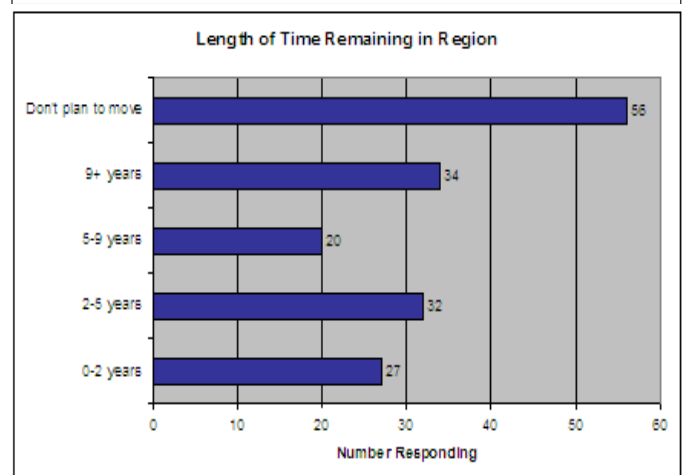
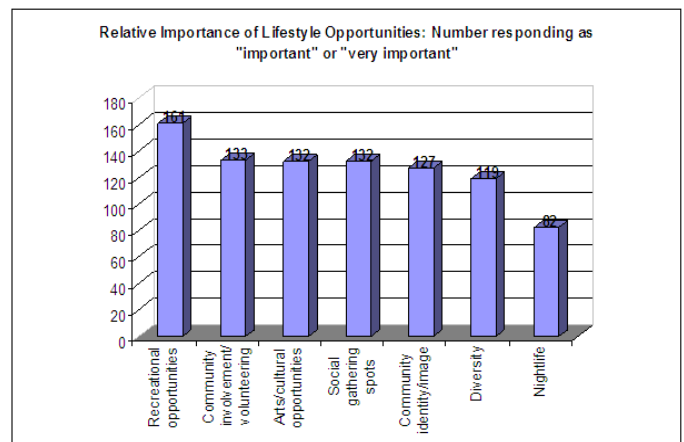
The group expressed that the area is typically "behind the curve" and is not taking advan-

tage of directions or policies that other regions have been implementing in order to develop their employees.

Discussion Topic: Non Work-Related Activities

All young professional focus group participants had positive things to say about leisure activities available in the area. The strongest opportunities were recreation-based, including water and mountain sports. The quiet, peaceful nature of the region was repeatedly cited as a positive quality. Essex and Franklin County participants emphasized the arts community and cultural events that occur in the area. Clinton County participants cited college sporting events available in Plattsburgh.

There was more variance expressed about what is not well-provided in the community. Clinton County young professionals stated that there are very few activities for children or families, and a lack of arts and cultural events. They also



expressed a desire for more public access to the Lake Champlain waterfront, such as a non-motorized boating center and more biking and walking trails. Clinton County participants criticized the high number of bars and limited hours of retail and coffee houses in downtown Plattsburgh.

Essex and Franklin County participants stated that it is extremely difficult for young professionals without children to meet, and that there are almost no acceptable social meeting destinations. They also identified a lack of variety and number of restaurants, and a desire for upscale pubs, lounges, and eating establishments. The young professionals in this

focus group stated that businesses often open in the area without a long term plan or professional appearance (e.g. inadequate or unattractive signs or inconvenient hours), and do not stay in business very long, which is unfortunate for the community.

Discussion Topic: Community Involvement/Volunteer Opportunities

Both focus groups stated that there are “amazing” and fulfilling opportunities to become involved with the myriad of community groups in the region. The only criticism was that for new residents, particularly singles, it can be difficult to find out about these opportunities.

Discussion Topic: Community Identity and Image

Both focus groups also thought that identity and image could be improved in the region. They noted that the communities’ image and identities have real substance (for instance, Saranac Lake’s artists and recreation base, Plattsburgh’s military and maritime history and recreation base), but a lack of consistent promotion locally and regionally. The Clinton County group questioned the use of Plattsburgh’s “Lake City” slogan as it does not seem to have caught on. The Franklin and Essex County group brought up Saranac Lake’s recent embracing of the concept of a “Green City”, cautioning that more work might be needed

to be sure this really captured the area’s identity correctly.

Discussion Topic: Diversity

Both focus groups expressed concern with a lack of diversity in the region. Exceptions were noted, including several employers and universities which provide the majority of the region’s cultural and ethnic diversity. Both groups were concerned that there is some level of bigotry in the region. It was noted that an increased population of younger citizens and professionals would likely offset negative perceptions and hopefully enhance the area’s limited diversity. ☞

2007 American Community Survey – Clinton County

	2006		2007	
	Number	%	Number	%
Total population	82,166		82,215	
Total Number of Households	29,439		30,408	
EMPLOYMENT STATUS				
Population 16 years and over	68,629	84%	68,974	84%
In labor force	38,920	47%	40,148	49%
Civilian labor force	38,764	47%	40,046	49%
Armed Forces	156	0.2%	102	0.1%
Not in labor force	29,709	36%	28,826	35%
Employed	36,270	44%	37,477	46%
Unemployed	2,494	6.4%	2,569	6.4%
INCOME				
Median household income (dollars)	42,406		46,439	
Per capita income (dollars)	20,594		21,804	
% of people w/ income below the poverty level	15.2%		12.3%	
HOUSING				
Total housing units	34,373		34,491	
Occupied housing units, % from total	29,439	86%	30,408	88%
Owner-occupied, % from total	20,783	60%	22,316	65%
Housing units with a mortgage, % from total	13,480	39%	13,047	38%
Housing units without a mortgage, % from total	7,303	21%	9,269	27%
Renter-occupied, % from total	8,656	25%	8,092	23%
Median Housing Value (dollars)	107,300		114,900	
Median Monthly Owner Costs for Housing Units				
with a Mortgage (dollars)	1,105		1,188	
Median Monthly Owner Costs for Housing Units				
without a Mortgage (dollars)	398		446	
Median Rent (dollars)	608		579	

Source: US Census Bureau