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## Applicants Compete For Jobs

### SALVATION ARMY BELL RINGERS MUST PASS RIGOROUS BACKGROUND CHECK

By [Lana Flowers](#)

Sunday, December 6, 2009

[Print item](#)

Higher unemployment means more competition for holiday jobs, from Salvation Army bell ringers to department store salespeople to package delivery drivers.

The Northwest Arkansas Salvation Army hired 63 to 70 people to ring bells in the annual Red Kettle Christmas campaign at stores such as Harps, Hobby Lobby, Walgreens and Walmart, said Tim Williford, Salvation Army area commander.

"We had 342 applications we processed," for Benton and Washington counties, Williford said, which means the organization received about five applications for each bell ringer job.

The Salvation Army recruits volunteers to ring bells near store entrances, but also hires bell ringers, who earn \$7.25 per hour, Williford said.

Qualifications include passing a background check, not having past criminal activity involving cash or children and no felony convictions.

The Northwest Arkansas Salvation Army wants to raise \$350,000 through the kettle campaign, including money to pay bell ringers.

Williford said the campaign also pays for Salvation Army programs through April. That includes providing help with utility bills, food and clothing for needy families, he said.

Williford said he thinks competition for bell ringer jobs was fiercer this year because national unemployment hovers around 10 percent.

The national unemployment rate was 10.2 percent in October, the most recent figure available.

It was at 5.3 percent in Washington and Benton counties, meaning 53 people out of every 1,000 were looking for jobs.

The unemployment rate counts only those actively seeking work.

The local rate is double what it was three years ago, said Kathy Deck, director of the Center for Business and Economic Research at the Sam M. Walton College of Business at the University of Arkansas.



Target associate Jelin Castro packs Wanda Ford's bags at the checkout counter Thursday in Rogers. Castro was one of many seasonal workers hired by the store to help handle the holiday workload.  
Photo by [Anthony Reyes](#)

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That increases competition for any jobs, including holiday retail jobs.

"You have everyone trying to keep as healthy a balance sheet as they can, as this is the time to add some money at a time of year when there is a lot of spending," Deck said.

Higher unemployment means employers can be choosier about who they hire from a wider range of applicants. "Obviously it is real tough for people looking for a job," Deck said.

FedEx Ground in Lowell keeps 21 contract drivers on staff year and added 12 temporary drivers this year for the peak shipping season between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day, said Lennia Daulton, FedEx Ground office administrator.

The temporary drivers earn about \$11.50 per hour and the office received 60 applications, up from 40 for 12 positions last year.

"We do such rigorous background checks. We had a lot of good people but they would fail something on their background check. We had seven that failed the drug test," Daulton said.

One driver applicant wasn't hired because of a misdemeanor traffic offense, Daulton said.

FedEx Ground added other positions for the holidays, including a temporary office clerk, a part-time office clerk and six package handlers, Daulton said.

SnagAJob.com surveyed 1,005 managers responsible for hiring hourly workers. The online survey, conducted Sept. 11-17, found each manager planned to hire 3.1 hourly seasonal employees this year, a 16 percent decline from the 3.7 average hourly workers hired last holiday season.

Belk, a department store at Scottsdale Center in Rogers, hired about 15 seasonal parttime employees. The store received about 40 applications for those jobs, said Michael Crumley, Belk men's/children's area sales manager.

Target in Rogers upped the store staff by 15 percent for the holidays, said Chuck Simmons, Target store manager. However, he declined to say how many employees the Target store has year-round.

Dillard's, at Pinnacle Hills Promenade in Rogers, didn't hire additional staff just for the holidays, but hired 12 in October, said Brad Lipps, store manager.

"We were getting tons of applications, and still are, but I am finished with my hiring until after the first of the year," Lipps said.

Dillard's may hire some employees in February if others leave, he said.

"That's not happening as often," Lipps said.

Dillard's bases employee pay on the total of sales per hour, so pay varies between \$9 and \$15 per hour, he said.

Catering and event planning firms may also add people to work holiday parties and events.

Callie Flynt, who works for Catering Unlimited in Springdale, said the firm has six fulltime staff but will add people to work events as needed.

The Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce has its annual meeting Monday and the catering firm called in six additional people to work the event, bringing the total to 12 people at the function, Flynt said.

"It's not necessarily just the holidays. We could have a big event, say, in the summer," such as a June wedding, Flynt said.

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