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N.C. workers have many reasons for holding down two jobs

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GREENSBORO, N.C. - Jaison Sheppard clocks out from unloading trucks for Frito-Lay at 7 a.m., but he's not off work. His second job awaits in the parking lot outside.

Having put on different work clothes, he's off to change oil, check spark plugs and fix tires for co-workers and other customers for the rest of the day.

Sheppard wants a good life for his family. But he can't do it on one job alone. And neither can as many as 35,000 other people in the Piedmont Triad who work more than one job.

The number of people with two or more jobs is growing in North Carolina. Only Oklahoma added more workers with two or more jobs in 2004, according to the most recent estimate by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Why are more people punching two clocks? Sometimes it's about making ends meet; paying down debt; building a business or pursuing a dream. And sometimes it's just to make extra spending money.

"We do see a lot of people who have a permanent job and they come to us because they need extra income," said Pam Medlin, the president of Key Resources, one of the Triad's largest employee placement services. People want to earn money for vacations this time of year or for Christmas, she said, or they are working to set up new businesses.

Even with the local unemployment rate around a low 4 percent, there are plenty of jobs, said Mark Harris, branch manager of the Guilford County office of Manpower staffing services.

Popular second jobs include retail positions, restaurant work and certain kinds of jobs in teaching, warehouses and call centers.

The key to making any second job work, Medlin said, is variety.

"Let's say you're a paralegal during the day," she said. "We would not put you typing medical transcriptions at night because the stress is too much."

Harris tells of a professor who worked one summer at a cardboard recycling plant as a mental break.

"We had one of the best-educated recycling cardboard guys you could ever have," he said.

It's not always simple to explain why people work more than one job. In the 1990s, a study by the U.S. Department of Labor said that nonfinancial reasons may be at least as strong as financial ones when it comes to working more than one job.

Many people who don't really need the money work more than one job because they see opportunities and seize them, the report said.

Highly educated people are actually more likely to work second jobs because they tend to have flexible schedules and their skills are in high demand. Some simply do the extra work to gain more knowledge or experience, according to the report.

But many workers in the Piedmont Triad are like Jaison Sheppard, working extra jobs because they have to, not because they want to, local employment experts say.

Since 2000, Piedmont Triad workers with limited education have found it hard to get by after the loss of thousands of textile and apparel jobs.

The era of getting a good-paying job with just a high school diploma is over. Many workers who could support a family on one textile job now find it hard to get by even with multiple jobs in fast food or retail.

"The \$15 (an hour) jobs they had with the skill sets they possess are no longer available, so relatively speaking they're working two \$7 jobs for 15 to 16 hours a day," said Harris, of Manpower.

The future for those with limited education will only get bleaker: Through 2014, of the fastest-declining jobs, textile jobs make up the top three, the Employment Security Commission of North Carolina said.

The fastest-growing jobs? Low-wage positions such as in retail sales, cashiers and waiters.

That's one reason the local community colleges are scrambling to build programs that will train workers quickly for better-paying jobs in such growing fields as medicine.

Medlin, with Key Resources, says workers should take the time to consider a second job that will help them succeed. But they must also be realistic, she said, because any second job requires sacrificing time with family and friends.

"That's where we try to figure out if your permanent job is the most stressful," she said. "Then we want to make their second 'looking for extra income' job more relaxing."

A person looking for Christmas gift money, she said, might enjoy working at a call center Saturdays and Sundays for 16 hours a week. Some people might enjoy the challenge of physical work on a dock at night while others want only desk work on the weekend.

Fitting a worker's lifestyle is the key, she said.

But while working extra hours can help the budget, it can also hurt the body, said industrial psychologist Mike Zickar, an associate professor of psychology at Bowling Green State University in Ohio.

Some with multiple jobs don't ever spend time to recover from work. And Americans, in general, are bad at doing that, he said.

"It's like being hung over at work all the time," Zickar said. "It has long-term effects. If somebody is going nonstop at work, they're always in a bad mood, they're agitated, their attention span is low.

"You can think of the consequences on family life, attention to kids. Part of the success of being a good parent is just spending time with kids."

Still, he admits the benefits are worth it for many workers.

Zickar spoke of a friend who was a chemical engineer making big money. "He applied for a job at a bookstore at a mall so he could meet women," he said. "He was working in a largely male environment. The second job was really fulfilling a social need that he wasn't getting on the first job."

If your second job is too stressful, though, it can hurt your primary job, he said.

"It would be very helpful to try to segregate those jobs as much as possible," Zickar said. "Put up strict boundaries between them. Don't take calls from your first job at your second job. That really helps eliminate the negative spillover. Leave behind the bad stuff."

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