

## COUNTY WORKFORCE

# San Bernardino County well positioned for job growth

By **Sandy Harmsen**

As San Bernardino County continues to recover from the economic downturn, many are still asking, "Where are the jobs?" To answer this question, the County of San Bernardino Workforce Investment Board contracted with Chmura Economics & Analytics to conduct an in-depth study of the Inland Empire's economic structure and employment outlook.

The study identified industries likely to expand in the next three years, providing more jobs with better salaries, to residents of the Inland Empire.

Armed with the results of this study, the County of San Bernardino Workforce Investment Board is developing new initiatives and no-cost training programs to prepare residents for jobs in the area's booming industries — one of which is logistics.

### Why logistics?

While healthcare continues to lead job creation, blue-collar industries, once overlooked by job seekers on the hunt for higher income, are gaining ground in San Bernardino County's employment landscape. At the forefront of this category is the logistics and transportation industry. The combination of obtainable land, a skilled workforce and a good location has positioned this county as a top logistics hub according to BJ Patterson, president of Pacific Mountain Logistics and chairman of the In-

land Empire Logistics Council.

Patterson, who also serves on the board of directors for the Distribution Management Association says, "San Bernardino County is held up in the logistics industry as an example of excellence, both nationally and internationally. Our access to major freeways, seaports and affordable real estate, plus an available workforce, has other regions striving to develop similar resources."

It is these competitive advantages that have allowed the transportation, distribution and logistics sector to grow during the recession. According to the report from Chmura, the industry will continue to develop. Chmura predicts the sector, which currently employs more than 70,000 in the Inland Empire, is poised to grow by 2.7 percent annually for the next three years. This number represents several thousand middle-class jobs for residents.

### What do these new logistics jobs require?

As the logistics and transportation industry continues to leverage more technical equipment, new job opportunities are developed. The worry that technology will replace people is unfounded. Instead, technology is eliminating strenuous physical labor and human error. Now, rather than picking orders by hand, logistics employees are operating and repairing the machines that can accomplish tasks quickly and accu-

ately.

As production increases, light labor tasks such as hand-packing boxes, a process that sometimes cannot be automated, will continue to grow.

Warehouses now need technicians, mechanics, electricians and operators trained to keep machines on track. Most of these positions involve specialized training but pay significantly better than jobs requiring similar experience and training in other industries.

### Do these jobs pay well?

According to Patterson, in today's logistics industry, great entry-level wages are not reserved for upper management positions. Even current starting wages for general labor often are between \$12 and \$16; for those trained to operate new technology, these wages jump to \$30 to \$35 per hour.

Good jobs like the ones being created in the logistics sector are critical to the recovery and success of San Bernardino County. Whether employed or unemployed, a logistics leader or a retail store owner, good jobs in one industry mean a rising standard of living for everyone in our county.

*Sandy Harmsen is the executive director of the Workforce Investment Board and director of the County of San Bernardino Workforce Development Department.*

