

EAST JOURNAL

Food Focus: Leveraged-buyout fund firm turns its eye to the restaurant industry, Page S2.

**Anglers Rally
Link
Fishing'**

**heads to Thin
but Fishermen
ons the Well**

OLLENKAMP
ALL STREET JOURNAL
A RIVER—Chasing
inellgrove pulls his
southeastern Geor-
ie stands up and
in his fishing line.
Pull it on down. Go
feels a tug on the
only, the line slack-
utters.
d flathead catfish,
fish to swim these
up, Ga., has eluded
men who showed up
t annual One Stop
ournament, spon-
ry fishing tourna-
ort to rid the Al-
Not all the flat-
hat Georgia's le-
sources will back
fish with 24 volts.
g called electro-
king a 30-foot ca-
ng through it out
15 seconds or so,
e surface, where
t by hand. State
doing this since
fish population,
species of fish
p.
tends to kill the
atheads. "When
y do, they won't
Kelth Padgett,
ackle, who says
each round of
es place once
mile Altamaha.
Padgett looked
a catch of 2,000
ort of the 10,000
ectro-fishers in
ut Mr. Padgett
o persuade the
ry.
1973, when the
Mississippi River,
Column 5

To Serve and Defect: Government Struggle to Keep Key Jobs Filled

A Southeast Journal Roundup
Think you have a hard time finding workers in the Southeast's tight labor market? Be thankful you're not the government.

Try finding a computer programmer willing or able to work on an archaic mainframe. Or a state auto-license clerk eager to face testy customers who have just waited an hour in line. Or an inspector who checks for leaks in a hog-waste lagoon on a hot September day.

At government agencies, thousands of such jobs are going begging. Federal, state and local offices are limping along with key vacancies that linger for months, even years. Some are in hot fields like information technology; others are hot-seat positions where workers almost deserve hazardous-duty pay; and some are just plain hot, like dump-truck drivers and other highway-equipment operators in metro Atlanta, where 63% quit over a year.

"In a tight labor market, no one wants to inspect pig farms," says Tom Cunningham, senior economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta.

Part of the difficulty is the familiar problem of the generally lower-paying public sector struggling to compete with the private side. But that problem has been exacerbated by acute private-sector labor shortages that have jacked up wages and made the compensation gap even wider. At the same time, a crop of young job-hoppers are less attracted by the traditional appeal of a government job: security.

The problem is all the more glaring in the Southeast, where a surging population has created a critical need for more road-builders, school teachers and other government workers.

Government is at its biggest disadvantage trying to find technology workers, says John D. Kasarda, director of the Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "With high-tech companies paying \$100,000 for people with nothing more than a college degree, these people aren't even thinking about going into government work," he says. Another turnoff for techies: "They don't want to get involved in the crossfire" of politics and controversy that sometimes come with government jobs, adds Mr. Kasarda.

Government customer-service jobs turn over frequently, too, because increas-



ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAVE KLUG

ingly "the government is seen as the enemy and scapegoat," says John A. Challenger, executive vice president of Chicago-based Challenger, Gray & Christman Inc., which specializes in advising laid-off employees. "These people are on the firing line when people feel their taxes are too high, their schools are understaffed or their garbage is not picked up on time."

To compete, government recruiters are offering everything from flexible hours to college-tuition assistance. In South Carolina, Human Resources Director Donna Traywick is pushing for more college internships, which she says help change students' perception that "you won't make any money and you won't be challenged" in the public sector.

In Alabama, they're even having a hard time hiring the hirers. Trevor Bain, head of the Human Resources Institute at University of Alabama's business school, says after decades of not hearing from area governments, suddenly they're all calling in need of human resources workers. Few of his students take the jobs though. By the time they jump through all the government hoops, such as taking exams and being

sector has already offered them a job."

Here's a sampling of government jobs in the Southeast that, for now at least, no one seems to want—and what recruiters are doing to try to fill them.

TIRELESS TECH

Ruth Kirkland, a technical services manager for the South Carolina Budget and Control Board, has tried for a year to fill an "information resources consultant" job. She's posted it on a state Web site, advertised in Columbia, S.C., and Charlotte newspapers—and turned up 50 applicants, none suitable. Many are what she calls "technician wannabes." One demanded \$5,000 more than the \$36,000 to \$38,000 annual salary set for that position. Ms. Kirkland said no, even knowing comparable private-industry jobs pay \$42,000 to \$60,000, because she didn't want to create an inequity with other employees.

Such vacancies have delayed planned network upgrades, prompting complaints of slow e-mail response time for the 1,300-employee central state agency.

For the other 15 technicians in her

Southeast Faces a Shortage of Public S

Continued From Page S1

department, three vacancies have meant longer hours during crunch times, such as last month when they had to hurriedly set up 15 personal computers for a state command center as Hurricane Bonnie threatened the South Carolina coast—at the same time they were moving 12 governor's office PCs into the restored statehouse. The job required Doug Vickio to "pull three all-nighters in a row," says the 29-year-old information resources consultant.

In Georgia, a recent study by 12 state agencies found 168 information-technology openings, a vacancy rate of 27%, not including another 358 such jobs that officials said they wanted funded. Part of the problem is that many departments have mainframe computers that run on older programming languages. "It is more difficult to find people to work with those systems and who know those languages," says Dalia Russell, commissioner of the Georgia Merit System, that state's central personnel agency.

But Georgia even has trouble filling jobs that require more modern skills or languages. So, the Merit System has asked for \$4.3 million for supplements of 10% to 30% on top of base salaries for information-technology jobs, which run from \$26,646 for entry-level network specialists to as high as \$96,804 for senior systems-programmer supervisors.

And individual agencies are coming up with their own ways to hire and retain programmers. When Mike Nixon, information-technology director for the Georgia People Board, was having trouble enticing graduates from local university computer departments, he decided aptitude, rather than experience, was what counted.

After hiring Glenda Dykes, a 30-something master's student in computer systems at Georgia State University, to work as a temporary help-desk staffer, Mr. Nixon decided in March she could be trained as a programmer.

"He said, 'If you can do it, try it and do it,'" says Ms. Dykes, who has since designed a program that allows the parole board's 800 employees to log their vacation plans into the agency computer network. "Nobody would have given me a chance [in private industry] because my resume would not have reflected my technical or computer aptitude."

—Ken Gepfert and Motoko Rich

SMALL-TOWN PLANNER

Government recruiters aren't always competing with the private sector. For the region's small communities or counties, the competition can be bigger government units next door.

"Our problem is we compete in the job marketplace with a very large county, with a large population, whose tax base is significantly larger than ours," laments Phill Jones, county administrator in Georgia's Bryan County, a coastal area of about

25,000 residents adjacent to booming Chatham County and Savannah.

Add a little controversy to the job, and it becomes a real headache to fill. The county has had three planning and zoning administrators in the past six years, says Mr. Jones. Within the past two years all seven staff members in the planning department, from the director down to the secretaries, have left.

The reason? "Planning can be a very controversial issue," says Mr. Jones. Landowners tend to feel "it is my land and I paid for it and I can do what I like with my land," and no one likes any governmental controls over use.

In a rural county like Bryan, antipathy toward planning officers can be particularly high, says 32-year-old John Karrh Jr., who served as the county's building and zoning director for four years.

Last year Mr. Karrh took a job as planning director in neighboring Effingham County, where he has more responsibilities than he did in Bryan. Another incentive to move: "It's a little bit more money," says Mr. Karrh.

—Motoko Rich

HOG-WILD SCIENTIST

Inspecting hog farms is not a job for the faint-nosed.

"It takes a special kind of person," says Bill Holman, assistant secretary of North Carolina's Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Fifteen animal-waste control officials are responsible for annually surveying the state's 2,450 farms that have 250 or more hogs.

Facing a slew of leaking hog-waste lagoons—including one that burst and dumped 20 million gallons of waste into the



New River in 1995—legislators slapped a moratorium on new hog farms and required an annual check of existing farms.

So who are the lucky ones who get that chore? Well-educated biologists who strap on their boots and check farms for everything from leaky lagoons to properly operating spray systems that later distribute the waste over fields.

"I enjoy meeting the farmers," says Brian Wrenn, 29, one of three environmental specialists or engineers in Wilmington.

He adds, "Some of them, I enjoy meeting more than others."

Sometimes, farmers aren't keen on having state officials looking over their shoulders. But a law is a law, and Mr. Wrenn tells reluctant farmers who won't let him on their farms that a search warrant might do the trick.

Mr. Wrenn, who earns \$30,000 a year, has a biology degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His goal is to find an environmental-policy job. "This job obviously would not be my first choice, but it is a good place to get your foot in the door," says Mr. Wrenn, who has been on the job for 19 months. "I'd hate to think I was going to be checking hog farms for the next five years."

Still, there are some days where Mr. Wrenn says he feels "refreshed," like when he "runs into a farmer who is generally concerned about his farm." And the smell? Eventually, says co-worker Dean Hunkele, who has a degree in environmental science, you get used to it. "To me," Mr. Hunkele says, "it's no worse than driving down a country road with your windows down."

—Carrick Mollenkamp

HELPING HAND

The search for competent workers never ends for Bernard Simons.

Mr. Simons is superintendent of the Clover Bottom Developmental Center in Nashville, one of Tennessee's three state-run institutions for the mentally retarded and developmentally disabled. At the campus-style institution, which houses 317 residents ranging from teenagers to octogenarians, Mr. Simons oversees a staff of 1,100, nearly 500 of whom help residents with their most basic needs, such as eating and bathing.

Assuming, that is, that he can keep 1,100 workers at one time. Right now, Mr. Simons's staff numbers only about 1,040, because he can't find enough of the so-called direct-care workers to keep up with the approximately 200 who quit each year.

Consider the nature of the work. Duties include changing the diapers of residents with bowel- and bladder-control problems and feeding those who can't feed themselves. "Some people just aren't cut out to do this kind of work," Mr. Simons says.

Then there's the money. The entry-level jobs pay just \$7.35 an hour. Notes Tom Sullivan, a deputy commissioner at the state Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation: "There are jobs flipping hamburgers that might pay more."

So Mr. Simons has had to get creative. He has launched a quarterly drawing for a \$100 cash award for those workers who have perfect attendance during the period.

And next Sunday, he's throwing an employee-appreciation party aboard the General Jackson, a riverboat donated for the party by Gaylord Entertainment Co.'s Opryland resort. If his staff-turnover prob-

lem weren't s
have held the
meeting hall.
call for big ge
Explains M
something sp



RC

Talk about
As the At
losing feder
ing—lackin
plan showin
ity standard
its ranks.

Last Janu
ning chief f
mission, the
quit to take
For seven m
nationwide s
interviewed al
20 people wh
commission'
they were no
ing for or th
we could aff

It probab
lanta is fac
tion crisis.
guidelines,
reduce its e
largely prod
214 tons per
the region w
sions only
Reaching th
take until 20

Last mon
nationwide
Jane Hayse
agency who
didn't want
her mind, M
"I already
upon us."

SOUTHEAST JOURNAL

Age of Public Servants

adds, "Some of them, I enjoy meeting more than others."

Sometimes, farmers aren't keen on having state officials looking over their shoulders. But a law is a law, and Mr. Wrenn tells reluctant farmers who won't farm on their farms that a search war might do the trick.

Mr. Wrenn, who earns \$30,000 a year, a biology degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His goal is to land an environmental-policy job. "This obviously would not be my first choice, it is a good place to get your foot in the door," says Mr. Wrenn, who has been on the job for 19 months. "I'd hate to think I'm going to be checking hog farms for the next five years."

Still, there are some days where Mr. Wrenn says he feels "refreshed," like when he "runs into a farmer who is generally concerned about his farm." And the end? Eventually, says co-worker Dean Hunkele, who has a degree in environmental science, you get used to it. "To me," Hunkele says, "it's no worse than driving down a country road with your windows down."

—Carrick Mollenkamp

HELPING HAND

The search for competent workers never ends for Bernard Simons.

Mr. Simons is superintendent of the Clover Bottom Developmental Center in Nashville, one of Tennessee's three state-run institutions for the mentally retarded and developmentally disabled. At the campus-style institution, which houses 317 residents ranging from teenagers to octogenarians, Mr. Simons oversees a staff of 100, nearly 500 of whom help residents with their most basic needs, such as eating and bathing.

Assuming, that is, that he can keep 100 workers at one time. Right now, Mr. Simons's staff numbers only about 1,040, because he can't find enough of the so-called direct-care workers to keep up with the approximately 200 who quit each year. Consider the nature of the work. Duties include changing the diapers of residents with bowel- and bladder-control problems and feeding those who can't feed themselves. "Some people just aren't cut out to do this kind of work," Mr. Simons says.

Then there's the money. The entry-level jobs pay just \$7.35 an hour. Notes Jim Sullivan, a deputy commissioner at the state Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation: "There are jobs flipping hamburgers that might pay more."

So Mr. Simons has had to get creative. He has launched a quarterly drawing for a \$1,000 cash award for those workers who have perfect attendance during the period. "And next Sunday, he's throwing an employee-appreciation party aboard the General Jackson, a riverboat donated for the party by Gaylord Entertainment Co.'s

them weren't so serious, he probably would have held the party in Clover Bottom's own meeting hall, he says. But big problems call for big gestures.

Explains Mr. Simons: "We needed to do something special."

—Jeffrey Ball



ROAD WARRIOR

Talk about bad timing.

As the Atlanta area faces the threat of losing federal funding for new road building—lacking a long-range transportation plan showing it can meet federal air-quality standards—it has had a gaping hole in its ranks.

Last January, the transportation planning chief for the Atlanta Regional Commission, the area's planning organization, quit to take a job with a consulting firm. For seven months, the panel conducted a nationwide search for a successor, and interviewed about six of the approximately 20 people who applied, says Joel Stone, the commission's director of planning. "Either they were not exactly what we were looking for or they wanted more money than we could afford," he says.

It probably didn't help, either, that Atlanta is facing something of a transportation crisis. The state, acting on federal guidelines, has mandated that the region reduce its emissions of nitrogen oxide—largely produced by car exhaust fumes—to 214 tons per day by 1999. But Mr. Stone says the region will be able to reduce its emissions only to 230 tons per day by 1999. Reaching the 214-tons-per-day target will take until 2005, he says.

Last month, the agency called off the nationwide search and offered the job to Jane Hayse, a nine-year veteran of the agency who earlier in the year had said she didn't want the job but ended up changing her mind, Mr. Stone says. Says Ms. Hayse, "I already know the challenges that are upon us."

Metakob Dish

Winners



LOS

Georgia Anglers Rally to State Practice of 'Electro-

Continued From Page S1

was illegally introduced into the Altamaha, says Donald Harrison, a fisheries biologist with the Natural Resources Department. The population soon exploded and the flathead began snacking on every other fish. "He can eat just about anything he wants," says Mr. Harrison.

The crafty flathead, with whiskers jutting from its gaping mouth, can weigh as much as a small child. The state record, caught on the Altamaha, is 63 pounds, 8 ounces. It likes to hide behind logs, nibbling at the live bait dangled by fishermen. Once hooked, it fights like a horse.

Fishermen love the challenge; but state officials are less charmed. The Natural Resources Department started electro-fishing as it became concerned that the flatfish were threatening to eat all the

Mr. Snellgrove, 27.

Mr. Padgett, who has been fishing for 15 years and has a shop after a stint in the military, caught a 10-pound flathead on Sunday night and, at 11:15 p.m., caught a 10-pound flathead.

But he's outdone by John Willis Jr., who caught a 10-pound flathead on Saturday until 4 a.m. Mr. Willis, a 31-year-old, was awarded with a 24-hour haul in with a 10-pound flathead.

At noon Sunday, the nearby lumber company's end. As the dusty parking lot filled with anglers, Mr. Padgett's go-to fish was awarded.

Mr. Harrison, who has been fishing for 15 years, says, "If the water was clear, we would have caught several fish."

Several fishermen from the long way around to ask if they could continue stunning the fish. Mr. Padgett says, "I know you'll never convince [Mr. Padgett] of that."

Nor any of the fishermen who showed up for his tournament. "I wouldn't want to catch a flathead if I had to," he says.



Flathead catfish

other fish. The goal, Mr. Harrison says, is to keep the flathead under control, not eradicate them. (The flathead stunned during electro-fishing are given to charities for food.)

The state has some fishermen on its side. In a February 1997 poll of 400 anglers, says Natural Resources fisheries biologist Rob Weller, 50% supported a reduction in flatheads and 30% opposed, with the rest not voicing an opinion. What about Mr. Padgett's and others' complaints that the shocking also stops other flathead from biting? At most, fish might not eat for two days, not two weeks, Mr. Weller says, adding, "I know you'll never convince [Mr. Padgett] of that."

Nor any of the fishermen who showed up for his tournament. "I wouldn't want to catch a flathead if I had to," he says.

SOUTHEAST JOURNAL—by mail, e-mail, fax. Letters should be sent to: Editor, So. Plaza, Suite 4200, Atlanta, Ga., 30304-404-865-0170; the fax is 404-865-4379; e-mail is ben.senfort@jrn.com

