



NEWS

Looking forward: Employment in Kawartha Lakes

Employment opportunities may be on the rise in several sectors in Kawartha Lakes in 2021, according to experts

By **Barbara-Ann MacEachern** Kawartha Lakes This Week

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The year 2020 has been a dark one for many, particularly those who lost their jobs or were precariously employed in Kawartha Lakes, but according to experts, there may be reason for optimism for 2021.

“We did see an initial drop in online postings during the early days of the pandemic,” says Sean Dooley, labour market information analyst with the Workforce Development Board, which covers Northumberland, Peterborough and Kawartha

Lakes and tracks employer hiring demand through online job postings.

“But the volume of online job postings have recovered midsummer and were similar to what we had seen pre-pandemic. Recently, job postings have begun to waver as cases began to rise, but there are still jobs being posted.”

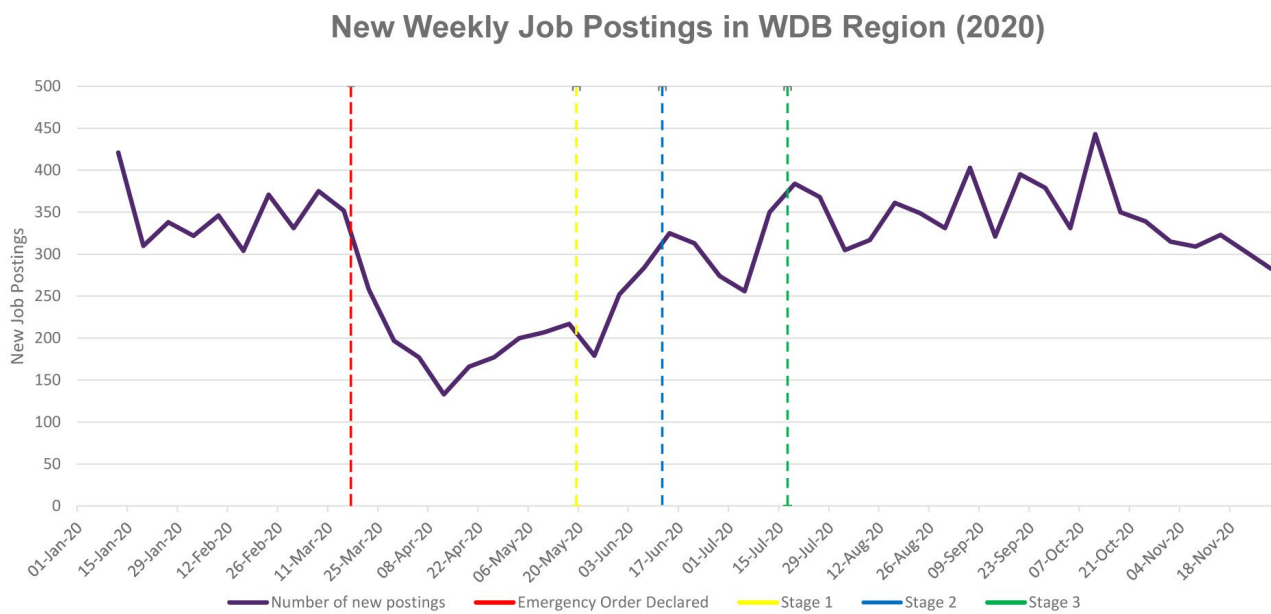
Dawn McColl, executive director of VCCS in Lindsay, says there wasn’t the same surge in hiring by retail and food service industries she usually sees before the holiday season.

According to the Labour Force Survey for the Muskoka-Kawarthas Economic Region, released Dec. 4, industries particularly hard hit in the region include manufacturing and parts of the tourism and hospitality sectors. Since February, retail trade employment is down almost nine per cent, arts, entertainment and recreation is down 35 per cent and manufacturing is down almost 20 per cent, although the latter has begun to come back as of November.

The news isn’t all bad, though; business was good this summer in the construction industry as people undertook home renovation projects, says Jennifer Lamantia, chief executive officer with the Workforce Development Board.

“It is likely, though not certain, that the construction sector will remain strong in 2021,” she says, for the seasonal work.

Likewise, more than 7,500 new jobs became available in the professional, scientific and technical services sector, according to the Labour Force Survey – an increase of 141 per cent, including jobs like accounting, legal and engineering consulting services. Health care and social assistance sector jobs are also up more than 20 per cent in 2020, with in-demand positions like personal support workers, nurses and community and social service workers actually posing a challenge to fill.



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“When it comes to food and accommodation services, employment has been very strong and (is) actually well above pre-COVID levels. Local employers have indicated that filling these positions can be a challenge, especially for cooks and chefs,” says Lamantia.

Looking to the year ahead, Dooley says he expects to see a continued demand for workers in the fields of skilled trades and health care occupations.

According to labour market projections through EMSI Analyst, Dooley says Kawartha Lakes is expected to experience the most growth in health care and social assistance, real estate, rental and leasing and manufacturing.

Statistics Canada’s new labour underutilization rate puts the Muskoka-Kawartha Economic Region at a rate of 40.5 per cent in May, three times higher than normal.

By September, however, it had dropped back to a more normal rate of 14.9 per cent.

Lamantia says the employment participation rate in the region is quite low, coming in at just below 58 per cent, which can at least partially be attributed to an aging population not comfortable dealing with the public during a pandemic. McColl adds that younger workers may also be reluctant to actively try to enter the workforce when faced with challenges like finding scarce child care, transportation and availability of technology.

While experts predict that a full recovery will take time, Dooley adds that continued improvements to the job market are expected in 2021. In the meantime, it is important to promote training, ensure educational opportunities match labour market needs and increase awareness about the changing labour market, he says.

Simple tweaks like customizing your resumé to your employer of choice, brushing up on your digital skills, expanding your network, identifying your transferable skills and those skills that could be upgraded, as well as learning how to properly highlight your relevant skills for a potential employer, can go a long way, she says.

McColl says job seekers need to take care of themselves first, to better their chances of not only getting a job, but keeping it, during such difficult times.

There are supports available, and no one should feel isolated in their effort to move forward, McColl adds.

“Recognizing that it is extremely stressful, job searching, even if you aren’t in a pandemic, so don’t be afraid to ask for help,” says McColl.

She encourages any potential job seekers to make an in-person or online appointment with VCCS as not only an employment resource, but also a source of other kinds of support within the community.

For more information on jobs available in the region, visit www.wdb.ca/map or www.wdb.ca/jobs.

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