

SOME INDUSTRIES THRIVING AMIDST PANDEMIC

Continued from page 1

seekers and major corporations alike, and the full effect likely won't be understood for years to come.

Not surprisingly, Halton Hills and the region at large have been dramatically affected.

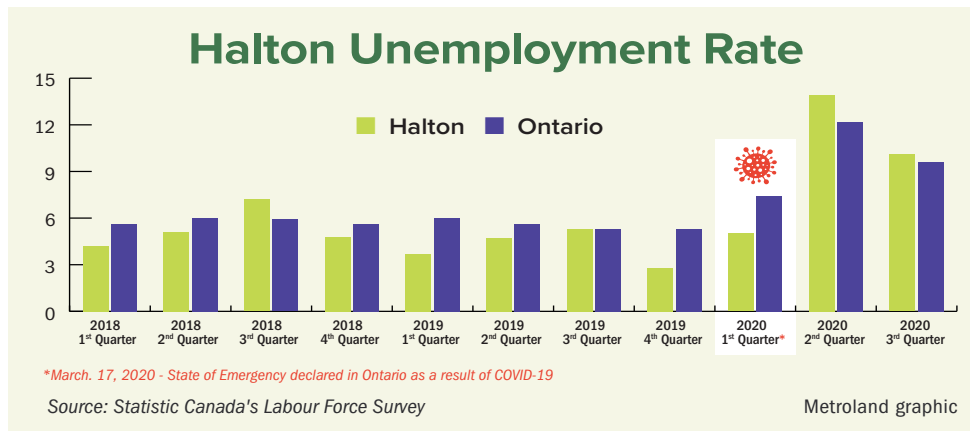
The local unemployment rate has been — to say the least — inconsistent. Following the March 2020 declaration of a state of emergency due to the pandemic, unemployment spiked as companies closed or laid people off in response.

As the situation became more stable, the unemployment rate both in the region and across the province returned to largely normal levels.

However, what companies across Halton have been experiencing is a significant challenge in finding people to hire.

Melanie Frazer, executive director of the Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce, said she's seeing hiring issues that have been complicated by the pandemic.

"What we're hearing from our members (is) that they're just struggling to get unskilled labour. So, whether that be retail or kind of minimum wage, entry-level, warehousing or labour positions, those companies are struggling quite a bit to find employees. And they were before



Melanie Frazer, executive director of the Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce, says there's a number of hiring issues facing the job market these days.

the pandemic and the pandemic actually only exacerbated it," said Frazer.

Struggles with finding employees are being experienced across the region.

Scott Wallace, president of the recently closed Burlington Taxi, specifically cited the challenges with

hiring as one of the key reasons for the closure of the business.

"My phone's ringing off the hook, but I can't find people to do the work. And, you know, my other business is very much the same — we have other business interests, but it's the same thing, I got more work than I know what to do with. I can't find people to do it," said Wallace.

The COVID-19 Business Survey conducted by Halton Region, alongside local municipalities, received over 700 responses from the local business community. Respondents cited a shortage of employees as one of the three biggest challenges facing their business.

Worldwide disruptions to the supply chain, an apparent local labour shortage, a population spending more time in their own homes and unpredictable government restrictions

have led to an economic picture in the region that is uneven and unexpected.

"Some businesses are having their best years ever — landscape companies, home improvement companies, construction companies, pool companies are doing phenomenally well. Then other businesses in the hospitality industry, restaurants, hotels are just getting decimated. A number of them are closing their doors and other ones are just barely holding on," said Terry Caddo, president of the Burlington Chamber of Commerce. "Reopened doesn't mean recovered."

The pandemic's effect on a business will be different for each individual organization, but a few broad trends can be identified.

In the case of restaurants and tourism-focused businesses, the region has already witnessed the closure of a number of popu-

lar local restaurants.

Those businesses have repeatedly pointed to ever-changing government restrictions combined with a population that is uneasy about being in public as the reason for their struggles.

On the other side, businesses involved in home improvement have widely been reporting that they are seeing remarkable profits.

Caddo and other chamber officials have speculated that the reason for that is when people are confined to their homes, many of them decide to start renovations or even install a pool.

Disruptions to the international supply chain have been affecting everything from the arrival of Christmas presents to the operation of major manufacturers.

Caddo said it's had real impacts on local business too.

"Everything is backed up. I heard from the Aldershot BIA there's restaurants that can't get buns for sandwiches, and they had to close down because they couldn't get their baking material in," said Caddo.

"Manufacturers are behind from supply chain hang-ups. You know, you hear about that across the country, but it affects Burlington businesses."

Despite the unusual stakes, there are a number of reasons to be optimistic about the future of Halton business and the associated job market.

There is some evidence

that one effect of the pandemic is that it has renewed people's support for buying local.

Campaigns like the Halton Hills Chamber's Support Local program received enthusiastic support.

"People have rediscovered their communities in a sense. So, I'm optimistic for that. I'm optimistic when I see that new businesses are still springing up. I think that's amazing and it speaks to, just the human nature of wanting to make something special and to make your mark. But I think 2022 will be a better year than we've seen for the past two years," said Frazer.

There's also growing optimism that the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated uncertainties are coming to an end.

According to the Halton Region Economic Review 2020, there are over 200,000 jobs available in a wide variety of industries. The median income of the region as of the 2016 census continues to be above the national average at \$42,577.

Those numbers were affected by the pandemic, but experts say the core strength of the local economy is still very much there.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: The disruption of the pandemic has caused a substantial impact on the job market. With that in mind, we wanted to take a closer look at what it has meant for how people earn a living in Halton.

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