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## Bay Area hiring plans uneven

By George Avalos  
Oakland Tribune

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The Bay Area job market has begun to revive, but the resuscitation doesn't extend to the East Bay or Solano County, a report released today suggests.

For the first time in nearly two years, more Bay Area companies are planning to hire than those that are planning to fire, according to the quarterly Business Confidence Survey.

"It looks like the Bay Area's job market is showing signs of life and may be on the rebound," said Jim Wunderman, president of the Bay Area Council, which commissioned the study.

The survey found that 20 percent of the nine-county region's employers plan to increase their work force within the next six months, while 17 percent anticipate job cuts. The report is based on interviews with about 500 CEOs and other top executives with companies located in the Bay Area.

The upswing has yet to benefit the region equally, though.

"This is a reassuring sign, but unfortunately these positive results are not across the board," Wunderman said. "The job market is very different depending on where you are standing."

The weakest job markets are in Alameda County, Contra Costa County, Solano County and San Mateo County, the quarterly report determined. The strongest markets are Santa Clara County, the Marin-Napa-Sonoma region, and San Francisco.

The differences in hiring plans over the coming six months in the various parts of the Bay Area are striking:

"In Alameda County, 27 percent of employers plan to cut jobs, while 14 percent plan to add jobs.

"In Contra Costa-Solano, 25 percent of the employers surveyed plan job reductions, and 11 percent intend to add jobs.

"In San Mateo County, 24 percent are planning staff cuts and 19 percent plan to add employees.

"In Santa Clara County, 7 percent plan job cuts and 25 percent plan staff expansions.

"In San Francisco, 14 percent of employers plan to cut staff and 22 percent intend to hire more workers.

The industry with the most pessimistic outlook on jobs is the retail sector. The health services industry and the education sector also anticipate significant job cuts. The sectors with the brightest outlook are the wholesale trade, leisure and hospitality industries.

"Small businesses are looking for furniture and are expanding their offices or moving to new offices," said John Schwartz, President of Sam Clar Office Furniture in Concord.

That's not the case with bigger organizations, he

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said.

Contact George Avalos at 925-977-8477.

"The activity among medium and large businesses is following the trend of the general economy, which is depressed at this point," Schwartz said.

To attract customers, Sam Clar is pricing furniture very aggressively, he said. And the company isn't adding employees at this point.

"We are not cutting positions, but we are not doing any actual hiring," Schwartz said. "What we are doing is we are cutting hours based on demand."

Sam Clar's strategy in a sour economy is simple: Ride out the storm.

"We have had the hatches battened down for the last 16 to 17 months," Schwartz said.

For some commercial real estate investors, it's a good time to buy properties.

David Hennefer, president of San Ramon-based Pacific Eagle Holdings Corp., is undertaking purchases of office buildings and luxury hotels on behalf of clients based in China.

The prices are good, but investors shouldn't expect an immediate jump in rental or room rates.

Despite the tough times, Hennefer believes the Alameda County-Contra Costa County region is well poised to bounce back once the economy improves.

"The fundamentals of the East Bay economy strong, they are healthy," Hennefer said. "The East Bay is a resilient market. I expect it to come back."

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