Professional jobs swell in number

**Analyst says growth should continue in good-paying industry**

By Jeanne Gustafson

Professional and technical services sector here has grown at a quick pace in recent years, even during the recession, while offering job opportunities that are not part of the larger work force in terms of jobs that don’t necessarily require advanced degrees, economists say.

“Professional and scientific services is one we really don’t have as many, but it’s a very important,” says Randy Barcus, chief economist for Spokane-based Avista Corp.

In some sectors, such as manufacturing, GDP can rise while labor forces shrink because of increased mechanical efficiencies, while in a sector like professional and technical services, which is “almost all a knowledge-worker sector, that kind of substitution isn’t as available or important,” Jones says. He says in the professional-technical sector, GDP growth is more strongly linked to increased employment.

What we are seeing locally is also being seen regionally, Jones says. "It’s an important area of growth, he says, because it doesn’t have a business and operational sense,” because it doesn’t have a business and operational sense, it’s a very, very broad area.

Barcus says the increase in the professional and technical services sector because it is a growth area that economists already knew about to some degree, but mapping it out and showing the growth it has experienced with solid figures brings it to the forefront as an economic development tool.

"I think there are a few of us who kind of knew this, but mapping them out” was a new exercise, Jones says.

Barcus says that the sector is growing rapidly elsewhere, too.

"What we are seeing locally is also being seen regionwide,” but that’s not a negative, he says. “It’s common in most communities to see this kind of growth. Portland, we’re not different, and it’s good.”

"It’s important for the city of Spokane because so many of these companies are located within the city,” Jones says.

Barcus says the increase in the professional and technical services sector here serves as a complement to manufacturing industry growth in North Idaho.

"I think our tax structure in Washington tends to favor businesses like this, while Idaho tends to favor manufacturing-type businesses,” he says. "It’s a very, very broad sense, because it doesn’t have a business and operational sense. But in Idaho, that’s not as negative. In Idaho, we’re working more with big business, and big business has a lot of opportunities, but it’s the same sense, because we have both sides of the coin here. When a company comes here we can put them in Post Falls or Liberty Lake, depending on the tax structure that works best for them.”

Barcus says a lot of jobs related to the emerging focus on environmental sustainability fall into the professional and technical services sector, making it likely to continue growing here for some time.

"A lot of those new arenas we are very excited about fall in this sector,” he says. "The ongoing outlook is this is going to be a focus of ours for a long time to come.”

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