



# HOPE FOR HOLIDAYS!

BY ELIZABETH LAZAROWITZ  
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## Unemployment rate lowest in more than 2 years

NOVEMBER BROUGHT a glimmer of hope for job-starved Americans as the unemployment rate plunged to its lowest level in 2½ years.

Employers added 120,000 positions last month, while the jobless rate fell to 8.6% from 9% in October, the Labor Department reported on Friday.

"You've got a picture of an economy that's getting stronger as we're going into the end of the year," said John Ryding, chief economist at RDQ Economics.

While the gain in payrolls wasn't terribly impressive, upward revisions to the data from the prior two months — for a total of 72,000 jobs — offered an encouraging sign, economists said.

Including people who want work but aren't actively searching and part-timers who would prefer full-time work, unemployment fell to 15.6% from 16.2%.

The report follows a string of data indicating that the economy hasn't stalled, as many feared it had just a few months ago.

But the devil may be in the details of Friday's jobs numbers.

"People shouldn't get too excited," said Christopher Probyn, chief economist at State Street Global Advisors, who called the report "decent and solid, but not stellar."

Over the past three months, payrolls on average have grown by 145,000, generally seen as enough to keep up with population growth.

But that's also similar to last

December's pace, pointing to a "sideways" trend, Probyn said.

While job creation helped push down the unemployment rate, another big reason it fell so far was that 315,000 people simply quit looking for work.

The number of people actively participating in the work force slipped to 64% from 64.2%.

About 13 million Americans remain jobless.

That means the economy still has a ways to go in digging itself

out of the deep jobs hole created as the economy crumbled in 2008.

Persistently high joblessness could prove to be a challenge for President Barack Obama, who will face voters in the November elections.

"It would be premature to say that this is the end or even the beginning of the end of our unemployment problems," said Milton Ezrati, senior economist at Lord Abbett. "It's the right direction, but it's not fast enough or strong to meet the economy's needs."

With Aliyah Shahid

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# Opportunity knocks — but not for everyone



Troy Baptiste has been out of work since July 2010. He's been forced to sell his car, his laptop and jewelry.

JAMELL POLLARD is walking on air: A month ago, he landed a job after three years of searching.

He's now the proudest worker in the produce department at the Red Apple Supermarket that recently opened in Fort Greene, Brooklyn.

"This job means everything to me," said Pollard, 38, who has been living in a Harlem homeless shelter for six months. "It means housing. It means stability. It means independence."

He's saving up money from his paychecks so he can rent a room in Bushwick.

A downtown Brooklyn nonprofit, the Hope Program, helped Pollard find his job. Another Hope client, Troy Baptiste, is eager for his turn to come.

Baptiste, 30, lost his job as a Mt. Sinai research lab technician in July 2010. While

searching fruitlessly for work, he has sold his car and his laptop and pawned his jewelry.

When his unemployment benefits ran out last July, he had to give up his Canarsie apartment and move in with his mom and little brothers in East New York.

What motivates Baptiste most in his job search is the thought of his 4-year-old son, whom he hasn't been able to help support since his unemployment benefits ended.

"He's definitely the battery that keeps me going," Baptiste said.

"I wake up in the middle of the night thinking, 'When is it gonna end? When will I work?' But most of the time I try to stay positive," Baptiste said.

"I just need an opportunity — any opportunity. I'll be the first one in the door in the morning and the last one out at night."

Lore Croghan



Jamell Pollard found a job at Red Apple Supermarket in Fort Greene, Brooklyn. Photos by Nicholas Fevelo