SALINE COUNTY CHOSEN BY MONEY MAGAZINE AS ONE OF TOP 100 PLACES FOR JOBS

CNNMoney.com recently listed the top ten best places to live for jobs in the U.S., and Saline County, Arkansas ranked 86 out of the 100 chosen. The article pointed out its convenient proximity to the urban city of Little Rock and the recreational area around Hot Springs. In addition to a low crime rate, great schools, and an unemployment rate of 5.7 percent, the article also touted the county’s emerging industries, new regional airport and industrial park.

BABY-BOOMERS TO REMAIN IN THE LABOR FORCE

The baby-boom generation – those born between 1946 and 1964 – is expected to remain in the labor force longer than previous generations. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, as this group ages, the number of people in the labor force aged 55 to 64 is expected to grow by 33 percent between 2008 and 2018, and the number of people aged 65 and older is projected to grow by 78 percent. The numbers of 45- to 54-year-olds and 35- to 44-year-olds are expected to shrink as baby boomers age and shift into older groups. Total labor force growth is expected to average about eight percent for the decade.

Thanks to advances in medicine, people now enjoy better health as they age and, as a result, are able to remain in the labor force longer than workers in previous generations did. A variety of economic factors – an increase in the Social Security eligibility age, for example – create incentives for people to keep working. Because of such factors, the number of people in the labor force aged 65 and older is expected to grow about ten times faster than the total labor force.

TENNECO EMPLOYEES EARN ONE MILLION WORK HOURS SAFETY AWARD

The employees of Tenneco Associates in Paragould were recently the recipients of a One Million Work Hours Safety Award presented by the Arkansas Department of Labor, the Arkansas Workers’ Compensation Commission and the Arkansas Insurance Department.

Nine hundred twenty employees accumulated 1,112,204 hours without a lost day away from work due to a work related injury or illness between January 13 and July 31, 2009. The company, which manufactures automotive components, has a sixteen member safety committee made up of both management and employees that has been in existence since 1990.

We are proud to present safety awards to Arkansas companies who excel in occupational safety and health. For more information on our awards program, contact Juanita Matlock at 682-9090 or email juanita.matlock@arkansas.gov.

COBRA Coverage Extended

Individuals who lose their jobs and thus their employer-provided group health coverage, now have the opportunity for six more months of reduced premiums. The Department of Defense Appropriations Act of 2010 recently amended the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act’s Consolidated OmnibusBudget Reconciliation Act (COBRA) premium reduction provisions, extending the eligibility period for two additional months (until February 28, 2010) and the duration from nine to 15 months.

Individuals who are eligible for COBRA coverage because of their own or a family member’s involuntary termination from employment that occurred during the period from September 1, 2008 through February 28, 2010 and who elect COBRA may be eligible to pay only 35 percent of their premiums, and the remaining 65 percent is reimbursed to the employer through a tax credit. This premium reduction is generally available for continuation coverage under the Federal COBRA provisions, as well as for group health insurance coverage under comparable State continuation coverage laws. Individuals who have reached the end of the original premium reduction period will have additional time to pay extension-related reduced premiums that were due prior to notice being provided.

For more information go to www.dol.gov/ebsa/faqs/faq-cobra-premiumreductionEE.html.
NEW RULES ISSUED
PROVIDING PARITY IN TREATMENT OF MENTAL, SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

The U.S. Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Treasury recently jointly issued new rules providing parity for consumers enrolled in group health plans who need treatment for mental health or substance use disorders. The new rules prohibit group health insurance plans – typically offered by employers – from restricting access to care by limiting benefits and requiring higher patient costs than those that apply to general medical or surgical benefits. The rules implement the Paul Whelstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (MHPAEA). MHPAEA greatly expands on an earlier law, the Mental Health Parity Act of 1996, which required parity only in aggregate lifetime and annual dollar limits between the categories of benefits and did not extend to substance use disorder benefits.

The new law requires that any group health plan that includes mental health and substance use disorder benefits along with standard medical and surgical coverage must treat them equally in terms of out-of-pocket costs, benefit limits and practices such as prior authorization and utilization review. These practices must be based on the same level of scientific evidence used by the insurer for medical and surgical benefits. For example, a plan may not apply separate deductibles for treatment related to mental health or substance use disorders and medical or surgical benefits. They must be calculated as one limit.

MHPAEA applies to employers with 50 or more workers whose group health plan includes mental health and substance use disorder benefits. The new rules are effective for plan years beginning on or after July 1, 2010.

For more information on the new rules, visit the U.S. Department of Labor’s Employee Benefits Security Administration webpage at www.dol.gov/ebsa/.

ARKANSAS SLIGHTLY BELOW MULTIPLE JOBHOLDING AVERAGE

In 2008, 25 states experienced increases in their multiple jobholding rates from 2007, 22 states and the District of Columbia recorded decreases, and three states had no change. Multiple job holders are those persons who report that they are wage or salary workers who hold two or more jobs, self-employed workers who also hold a wage or salary job, or unpaid family workers who also hold a wage or salary job. The national multiple job holding rate remained unchanged in 2008, standing at 5.2 percent for the third consecutive year. Nebraska and North Dakota recorded the highest rates of multiple jobholding, at 9.8 percent each, followed by South Dakota, at 9.5 percent. Nevada recorded the lowest multiple jobholding rate at 3.7 percent. Arkansas’s rate was 5.1 percent for 2008, up from 4.5 in 2007.

The largest over-the-year increases in multiple jobholding rates among the states were recorded in North Dakota, Idaho, Massachusetts, and Delaware. Missouri and Montana experienced the largest decreases, followed by Kansas, South Dakota and Washington.