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*Iron workers Daniel Najera and Gustavo Barba prepare parts for the roof of the new physical fitness center being constructed at Camp Pendleton, where dozens of white and blue collar jobs are available. (Photo by John Koster - For the North County Times)*

**REGION:** Military bases looking to fill variety of permanent job openings

By MARK WALKER - Staff Writer

As layoffs mount up and down the Golden State and the Dow continues to plunge, local and regional Marine Corps bases are beating the drum to fill hundreds of civilian job openings.

"Unlike the private sector, our world continues to build up," said Judi Ramiro, director of human resources for Marine Corps bases throughout California, Arizona and Hawaii.

"We are requiring more and more support positions and at any given time have a vacancy rate of 10 to 15 percent," she said.

Most of the openings are of the white-collar variety and are permanent, civil service jobs.

Right now at Camp Pendleton, Ramiro said she has nearly 200 openings. An additional 75 are unfilled at Miramar Marine Corps Air Station, and she's looking to fill 160 at the Marine Corps base at Barstow.

With the state's unemployment rate at 10.1 percent, the highest since a 10.4 rate in 1983, the openings are an ongoing bright spot in a struggling economy.

The picture is further brightened by an array of ongoing construction at area bases as the Marine Corps regionally undergoes its largest modernization effort in decades.

Maj. Gen. Michael Lehnert, commander of Marine Corps Installation West, is overseeing nearly \$5 billion of construction at the region's bases, including new housing for about 6,366 additional troops as the service increases its overall size to 202,000.

"We have a tremendous need for people with a variety of professional skills," Lehnert said Monday. "We will also need workers in many other areas that complement our overall

growth."

Many openings are tied to the modernization, but Ramiro emphasized that almost all are considered permanent positions that will last after the work is done, because of ongoing work after the major projects and expected retirements in the civilian work force in the coming years.

Even in the face of the nation's worst recession in decades, just getting people to apply for the civilian jobs is half the battle for the military, Ramiro said.

"When we go to job fairs and have booths at colleges, people avoid us because they assume getting a job with the USMC means they have to join the military," she said.

Among the current needs are architects, community planners and contract specialists.

While most of the current construction projects involve civilian contractors who hire their own crews, the region's bases do have blue-collar jobs to fill.

"We're looking for people in electrical, sewage and water treatment plant operations," Ramiro said, adding she also has openings for plumbers and other positions in the trades.

The Marine Corps is discontinuing using its own military police to staff entry gates, turning that work over to a 200-member civilian federal police force.

"We also are recruiting for that work, because even though all those are filled, we are starting to have turnover," she said.

Lehnert emphasized that successful job applicants will find their positions less susceptible to boom and bust cycles.

"We bring economic stability to the community, and we are glad to be able to bring jobs to Southern California," he said.

As the Marine Corps continues to modernize its bases through normal funding channels, the recently passed federal stimulus bill could mean other improvements may happen sooner than expected.

The bill provides several billion dollars to the Department of the Navy for construction of additional housing, day care centers, medical clinics and hospitals.

Base officials have said there are some projects they would like to see tap into that money, such as modernization of the Navy Hospital on Camp Pendleton.

If that comes to fruition, even more construction jobs and white-collar work associated with that project could become available.

As part of the ongoing construction, Camp Pendleton officials last week broke ground on a \$23 million Wounded Warrior Battalion facility that will house service members recovering from various injuries.

Construction is expected to start soon and be completed early next year.

The facility will replace an existing smaller complex now in use.

And even though the Pentagon is eyeing some major program cuts and slowdowns in the growth of defense spending, President Barack Obama last week proposed increasing the military's budget by 4 percent next year, taking it from \$513 billion this fiscal year to \$534 billion 2010.

For more on specific job openings at Marine bases in the region, see <https://chart.donhr.navy.mil>.

For federal government jobs in general, visit [www.usajobs.gov](http://www.usajobs.gov).

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