

Lousy economy means older recruits for military

By Diana Lambert, Sacramento Bee

Military recruiters may be the only people happy about the faltering economy because the high unemployment rate in Northern California is buoying recruitment numbers despite a dearth of eligible candidates.

Rampant obesity and a lack of education has made it difficult nationally for the U.S. military to find fresh recruits for several years.

But a relentlessly poor economy has the eligible lining up for spots in the Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force for salaries that start at \$1,491 a month, medical benefits and a monthly housing allowance.

“Here in Northern California, Stockton and Modesto has some of the highest unemployment in the nation, making the military a more viable option,” said Rod Kise, spokesman for the U.S. Army’s Recruiting Battalion – Sacramento, which covers Northern California, southern Oregon and parts of Nevada.

Air Force officials report the same trend nationwide. “When the economy dipped down we saw an increase of traffic in our office,” said Christa D’Andrea, a spokeswoman at the Air Force Recruiting Service headquarters in San Antonio. “It’s very competitive to join the Air Force right now.”

The result: Recruits are getting older.

Kise said that more men and women in their mid-20s are signing up instead of the 17- to 24-year-olds that usually make up the bulk of new recruits.

“We are seeing more families – husbands and wives,” Kise said.

They are looking for paychecks and benefits to help care for their families, he said.

Lt. Col. Eric Espino, commander of the 364th Air Force Recruiting Squadron at Mather Park in Sacramento, said the recent influx of candidates also can be attributed to the high cost of college and an expanded GI Bill that helps veterans pay for college.

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