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Hiring Picks Up Pace with Gains in Confidence

Featuring: Osprey

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CHICAGO, IL—Doing more with less. That was the strategy of several bike companies, many of which trimmed workers the past two years as they cut costs to align with a decline in sales. But with sales rebounding in the first quarter, suppliers are loosening their purse strings and slowly beginning to fill strategic positions.

Chicago-based sports and recreation recruiter Frank Whiting said companies focused on being lean as the economy slowed, leading to a smattering of layoffs. But in talking with CEOs he's found that they're ready to fill positions that have been vacant for six to nine months. "In the fall companies certainly addressed their pain points," Whiting said. "I saw that first. Now I'm seeing more strategic hires, with more forward thinking." Whiting said his recruiting firm is starting to see business rebound, but it's not quite at 2008 levels.

Confidence that the economy is turning around is evident nationwide. According to the U.S. Labor Department, employers added 290,000 jobs in April, representing the strongest hiring surge in four years. It's also the fourth straight month of employment gains.

But companies are still playing close attention to cost. Raynard said more companies are bringing the recruitment process in-house, posting job ads and searching for candidates on the Internet rather than working with a headhunter.

Osprey Packs, an outdoor company, is bolstering its personnel as it makes an aggressive push into the bike market with the launch of new hydration packs (see story page 8).

"We're looking to hire 10 or 11 new people," said John Pieper, sales director for Osprey Packs. "A lot of that is growth into the bike market."

The company recently hired a bike sales manager and is in the process of hiring a bike marketing manager. "We're committing pretty heavily to this," Pieper added.

