

Rosy labor report belies job seekers

Monica Brown has 15 years of marketing and sales experience, nearly half as a manager, trainer or team leader. Today, she's waiting tables.

For two months, the Alameda resident has risen at 6 a.m. each weekday and squeezed in at least three hours scanning job sites, filling out applications and tweaking her [resume](#) before rushing into work. But she has heard little beyond automated responses.

"I don't know why it is so freaking difficult to get somebody to open the door," said Brown, 34, who moved from Kansas City, Mo., a little more than a year ago.

She said this on Dec. 8, the same day the U.S. Labor Department reported the 39th straight month of job growth, an unemployment rate that ticked down a half-point from the prior year and average hourly earnings growth of 4.1 percent.

The East Bay job market is tighter still, with unemployment at 3.7 percent in October, below the threshold considered "full employment."

But the term belies the reality that Brown and many others face. Employment experts say it's largely a tale of two job markets. The most highly qualified, with impeccable credentials and a Rolodex of relationships, can easily snag jobs and demand high salaries and perks.

For those with red flags on their resume, or a shallow network, just landing a corporate [interview](#) remains a challenge. They may be employed as far as the Labor Department is concerned, but often, they're not doing jobs that reflect their experience, training or ambitions.

"When your expertise isn't perfectly suited to the positions that are available, you then move down from the 'A' category to the 'B' category," said Joel Garfinkle, an executive [coach](#) and founder of Oakland-based DreamJobCoaching.com. He said that many of the resumes posted on job sites such as CareerBuilder.com or Craigslist.org may even fall into a 'C' category.

"Is the job market improving so that the 'Cs' will get more nibbles?" he said. "Yes, but that's not happening as much as people might think."

There are two basic issues in play, experts say. First, unemployment statistics don't accurately reflect the job situation. Second, even if there are more jobs out there, they're not necessarily "good jobs" — the ones a college-educated or highly-experienced worker wants.

