Summer interns wanted: Companies rev up hiring

By Marcia Heroux Pounds, Sun Sentinel

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In another sign that the economy is improving, college students are finding more paid internships this summer.

Local employers – City Furniture, Norwegian Cruise Lines and Florida Power & Light among others – are back in the internship pool after cutting back during the recession. Local college recruiters say more companies are recruiting for internships that offer pay.

Janet Wincko, managing director of human resources for City Furniture, said the Tamarac-based furniture retailer didn't hire interns during the challenging recession years. This summer, the company plans to hire five to 10 interns, mostly from Florida universities.

"Business is improving, and it's time for us to increase that college recruiting presence," Wincko said.

The internships offer a minimum pay of $500 a week, and interns earn the regular commission rate on top of that if they make sales.

The companies have a chance to see what students can do during internships.

"When it comes to hire down the road, they have a bit of insider knowledge," said Sean Snaith, economist for the University of Central Florida.

Ashley Friedman, a 21-year-old Florida Atlantic University student, just started a summer internship selling furniture along side the pros at City Furniture in Tamarac.

"I thought it would be a great internship because it takes my management degree and puts it to good use," said Friedman, who is scheduled to graduate from FAU in the fall.

FAU career center director Sandra Jakubow said employers are again visiting campuses to recruit summer interns and potential hires. "That's a change from what we saw two years ago or even last summer," she said.

Average intern is paid about $12 an hour, Jakubow said.

Diane Klein, who heads the internship program at Nova Southeastern University in Davie, said major companies including Burger King, Norwegian Cruise Lines, Office Depot, as well as smaller ones, are looking for interns.
NextEra Energy, parent company to Florida Power & Light Co., is offering more internship opportunities, career center directors say. The company declined to say how many, but a spokesman said it has paid internships and wants students with skills in science, technology, engineering and math.

Unpaid internships were more common during the recession, but the Labor Department has been cracking down on firms that fail to pay interns. Legally, employers can arrange an unpaid internship if the student receives college credit and is being trained in a vocational skill, said David Gobeo, a lawyer with Fisher & Phillips in Fort Lauderdale.

Taylor Brown, a Nova Southeastern University freshman, is thrilled to have an unpaid internship this summer working on an event for the Christopher and Dana Reeves Foundation.

Brown, 19, said the job experience will help confirm her career choice combining in business and philanthropy. "Hopefully with this internship, I'll love it even more," she said.