

WORKFORCE CONNECTION

CITRUS • LEVY • MARION

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Regional jobless rate continues to fall

(OCALA, Fla.) – The jobless rate for Workforce Connection’s Citrus, Levy and Marion counties region followed state and national trends by dropping from 11.5 to 11.3 percent in December, down 2.1 percentage points over the year.

Out of a regional labor force of 205,919, there were 23,237 unemployed, 670 fewer jobless than in November 2011. At the same time, however, the size of the regional labor force shrank by 1,884 over the month and the number of those employed dropped by 1,214.

Florida’s unemployment rate in December fell to 9.9 percent and the national rate dropped to 8.5 percent.

December’s unemployment rate for each county in the Workforce Connection region were 11.6 percent in Marion County, down from 11.8 percent in November; 10.9 percent in Citrus County, down from 11.1 percent; and 10.2 percent in Levy County, down 0.2 percent.

Rusty Skinner, Workforce’s chief executive officer, cautioned that the monthly numbers are not seasonally adjusted and often fluctuate sharply due to seasonal events such as ramping up and down of temporary and part-time holiday hires.

Skinner said a clearer picture of long-term stability can be seen when comparing December’s employment to December 2010.

“When compared to the long haul and not just a short blip, we’re moving forward, just as the state is and the nation is,” Skinner said. “We see improved employment and reduced unemployment across the board.”

Last year during the same period, the regional unemployment rate was 13.4 percent, with Marion County at 13.9 percent, 12.9 percent in Citrus County and 12.0 percent in Levy County.

- Marion County unemployment dropped from 18,540 in December 2010 to 15,227 last month, the number of those with jobs increased by 857 to 116,023 over the year while the labor force shrank by 2,456.
- Citrus County's jobless dropped from 7,468 to 6,258 over the year, the number of employed increased by 566 to 51,191 and the labor force also expanded by 644 to 57,449.
- Levy's County had 324 fewer unemployed when compared to the same period last year, 242 more with jobs, up from 15,226, and minor shrinkage of the labor force, down by 82 to 17, 2220.

Becky Rust, Florida's chief economist and director of the state's Labor Market Statistics Center, said Friday that the unemployment rate dropped in 55 of 67 counties, remained the same in two counties and increased in 10.

"It's still a slow economic recovery in terms of jobs," she said.

The Ocala Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which covers all of Marion County, has the second highest unemployment rate among Florida's 23 MSAs, behind Palm Coast with 13.9 percent and just ahead of Sebastian-Vero Beach. In November 2011, the Ocala MSA inched up to third highest after seven months with the fourth highest ranking.

Rust noted that "long-term weakness in construction and losses in government contributed to the high unemployment rates in these areas."

In the Ocala MSA, mining, logging and construction lost 100 jobs over the month and 300 since December 2010; government jobs remained flat month-to-month and also 300 lost over the year.

Among Florida's 67 counties, Marion County's unemployment rate remained in eighth place, Citrus County moved up four notches to 13th while Levy County ranks 22nd highest.

Workforce Connection serves job seekers and employers cost-effective, high-quality employment, training and education. Last year, more than 36,000 career seekers and 1,600 businesses received services.

In releasing the state unemployment rate Friday, Gov. Rick Scott said he was "very encouraged by the success of our 24 regional workforce boards in providing skills and training of Floridians" in helping them obtain jobs.

Workforce Connection is the local, business-led organization that strives to connect qualified workers with local employers in Citrus, Levy and Marion counties through cost-effective, high

quality employment, training and education services in partnership with businesses, community-based organizations, educational institutions and governmental agencies.

To obtain a full copy of the December 2011 unemployment reports or to find out more about upcoming events and services, visit ww.clmworkforce.com or call 1-800-434-JOBS, ext. 1234.

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