

Labor force & employment up, joblessness down

Ocala and Homosassa Springs metros post top job growth in key industries

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OCALA – The unemployment rate in the CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion region was 4.6 percent in March, down 0.1 percentage point over the month and 0.6 percent lower than the same time last year. Out of an expanded labor force of 200,627, there were 9,211 unemployed, a decrease of 203 over the month and 1,043 fewer than March 2017.

According to today's (Friday, April 20) release of the March employment summary by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, preliminary unemployment rates were 5.2 percent for Citrus County, down 0.3 percentage points over the month; 3.9 percent for Levy County, which is unchanged; and 4.4 percent for Marion County, down 0.2 percent. Florida's not seasonally adjusted jobless rate – a measure that matches the way local rates are calculated – was 3.8 percent, the same as in February. All three counties experienced labor force expansion, increases in the numbers of employed and drops in joblessness.

Kathleen Woodring, executive vice president of CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion, said, "When you see that combination, it's like an economic trifecta. All three indicators in all three counties are moving in the right direction, and that's a big positive for our region."

Woodring said the report also highlights job growth in the Ocala/Marion County metropolitan statistical area where there were 103,700 nonfarm jobs in March, an increase of 700 jobs over the month and 1,700 more than March 2017.

The Ocala MSA posted the fastest annual job growth rate compared to all metro areas in the state in education and health services at 5.4 percent. In March, there were 19,400 jobs in education and health services, an increase of 1,000 over the year.

Also, for the third consecutive month, the Ocala metro area had the second fastest annual job growth rate among Florida metros at 8.9 percent. The 8,600 employed in manufacturing represents 700 more jobs than in March 2017.

Both industries sectors grew faster in the metro area than statewide over the year.

In March, nonfarm payroll employment in the Homosassa Springs MSA was 33,800, an increase of 700 jobs over the month and an increase of 400 jobs over the year, for a 1.2 percent annual job growth rate.

The Homosassa Springs MSA also had the fastest annual job growth rate compared to all Florida metro areas in government at 4.5 percent, an increase of 200 jobs over the year.

Here is the employment breakdown for each county:

- Citrus County posted strong gains over the month with a labor force that grew by 651 to 48,494 along with an increase of 743 to 45,960 in the number of employed while the number of jobless dropped by 92 to 2,534. That's an increase of 655 employed and 237 fewer unemployed compared to March 2017 when the unemployment rate was 5.8 percent.

- Levy County's labor force expanded by 35 over the month to 17,077, the number of those with jobs increased by 91 to 16,406 and the number of unemployed dropped by two to 671. That's an increase of 110 employed and decrease of 77 unemployed over the year when the jobless rate was 4.4 percent.

- Marion County's labor force grew by 695 to 135,056, the number of those with jobs increased by 804 to 129,050, and the number of unemployed fell by 109 to 6,006. That's an increase of 2,212 employed and decrease of 729 unemployed compared to March 2017 when the jobless rate was 5.0 percent.

Over the month, unemployment rates dropped in 49 counties, rose in three and remained unchanged in 15.

Citrus County's unemployment dropped from highest to second highest unemployment rate among the state's counties, Marion County also dropped a spot to hold the 12th highest and Levy County remained at 26th.

Among the metro areas, Homosassa Springs, which includes all of Citrus County, dropped behind The Villages for the second highest rate, and Ocala/Marion County remained fifth highest.

In addition to education and health services and manufacturing, Ocala MSA industries that gained jobs over the year were leisure and hospitality (+200 jobs); and trade, transportation and utilities (+100 jobs).

Financial activities, professional and business services and "other" services each lost 100 jobs over the year.

Mining, logging and construction; information; and government industries were unchanged.

The region's employment summary for April is scheduled to be released on Friday, May 18.