



**One highlight of the January employment report notes that the Ocala metropolitan statistical area posted the second fastest annual job growth rate compared to all other Florida metro areas in manufacturing, at 7.7 percent. In this file image from 2016, a worker at Scorpion Racing Products uses a dial caliper to check the dimensions of a trunnion for an aluminum roller rocker after it was manufactured at the Ocala facility.** [BRUCE ACKERMAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/FILE]

## Seasonal uptick seen in jobless rate

Staff report

Review of January employment numbers, released by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity following annual benchmarking, shows that unemployment rates rose in all of Florida's 24 workforce development regions and 22 metropolitan statistical areas, according to information provided Monday by CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion.

When viewed county-by-county, the jobless rate increased in 64 counties, dipped slightly in two and remained the same in one. The unemployment rate in the CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion region was 5.2 percent in January, up 0.6 percentage points over the month and 0.9 percent lower than the same time last year. Out of an expanded labor force of 197,054, there were 10,217 unemployed, an increase of 1,235 over the month and 1,842 fewer than January 2017.

"This is a trend we see every January as seasonal employees, hired for the holidays, return to the labor force," said Rusty Skinner, chief executive officer of CareerSource CLM, in the press release. "What is important is how we fared over the year."

Whereas the bump in the number of unemployed over the month fueled January's expanded labor force, Skinner said, gains in the number of employed account for the strengthening labor force over the year. The three-county region has 186,837 employed, or 1,896 more than January 2017.

Skinner said a "highlight in the January report" is that the Ocala metropolitan statistical area posted the second fastest annual job growth rate compared to all other Florida metro areas in manufacturing at 7.7 percent.

The January unemployment rates were 6.0 percent for Citrus County, up 0.6 percentage points over the month; 4.4 percent for Levy County,

an increase of 0.5 percent; and 5.0 percent for Marion County, up 0.6 percent.

Florida's not seasonally adjusted jobless rate — a measure that matches the way local rates are calculated — was 4.1 percent, an increase of 0.4 percent. The state's seasonally adjusted rate remained unchanged over the month, at 3.9 percent.

Preliminary numbers for the region show that Marion County's labor force was 132,802, an increase of 13 over the month, while the number of employed fell by 795 to 126,802 and those without jobs rose by 808 to 6,622. That reflects a drop of 1,249 jobless over the year and an increase of 1,004 employed compared to January 2017 when the unemployment rate was 5.9 percent.

Citrus County posted the highest unemployment rate among Florida's counties, Marion County ranked 11th and Levy County was 24th. Among Florida's metro areas, the Ocala/Marion County MSA held the fourth highest unemployment rate.

In January, nonagricultural employment in the Ocala MSA was 101,900, a gain of 700 jobs over the year; manufacturing was at 7.7 percent (+600 jobs); education and health services at 2.7 percent (+500); and government at 0.7 percent (+100 jobs). Professional and business services added 100 new jobs over the year. Industries that lost jobs were trade, transportation and utilities (-200); leisure and hospitality (-200); mining, logging and construction (-100); and financial activities (-100).

Skinner noted that spring career fairs planned in April, on-going hiring events for local businesses and fee-free employment services are some of the ways CareerSource CLM addresses shifts in the area's jobless rate.

February's unemployment numbers will be released March 23.