

Unemployment rises slightly; still lower than December 2017

The unemployment rate in the CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion region was 4.2 percent in December 2018, up 0.4 percentage point over the month and 0.4 percentage point lower than the region's rate a year ago.

The labor force was 201,256, a 2.7 percent increase of 5,338 peo-

ple working or actively looking for work compared to December 2017. There were 8,367 unemployed, an increase of 668 since November, but a drop of 615 over the year.

Compared to November 2018, the number of people working in the region fell by 729, but over the year employment increased by 5,963 when the unemployment rate was 4.6 percent.

Rusty Skinner, CareerSource CLM's CEO, said that seasonal fluctuations are expected, but noted that, over the year, the region saw signs of a strengthening economy with expanded labor force, increased number of those working and a drop in those unemployed.

"As we end the year issues of seasonal employ-

ment tend to impact the month-to-month comparisons. Because of this, the most valid analysis focuses on yearly comparisons," Skinner said. "When we compare December of 2018 and December of 2017, we see positive movement in each of our counties."

Skinner added that the Ocala metropolitan statistical area, which encompasses all of Marion County, continues to show strong growth in key industry sectors, leisure and hospitality, posting the state's second fastest annual growth rate at 7.9 percent for an increase of 1,200 new jobs, and education and health services, which added 1,000 new jobs for an increase of 6.4 percent which was the second fastest growth rate among all Florida.

In the three county region, Levy County main-

tained the lowest jobless rate in the region at 3.6 percent, up 0.3 percentage point over the month; followed by Marion County's rate is of 3.9 percent, an increase of 0.2 percent; and Citrus County's rate of 4.9 percent, 0.4 percentage point more than November 2018. Florida's not seasonally adjusted jobless rate – a measure that matches the way local rates are calculated – increased from 3.1 to 3.3 percent, which is 0.4 percentage point less than a year ago.

Here's how each county fared in the latest report:

Citrus County's labor force fell by 102 to 48,047, the number of employed dropped by 323 to 45,675 and the number of unemployed rose by 221 to 2,372. However, over the year, when the county's jobless rate 5.3 percent,

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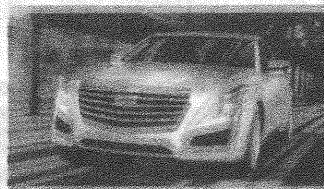


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JOBS

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the labor force has expanded by 838, the number of employed increased by 988 and the number of unemployed has fallen by 150.

Levy County's labor force contracted by 114 to 16,988, the number of those with jobs decreased by 162 to 16,371, and the number of unemployed increased by 48 to 617. Compared to December 2017, when the unemployment rate was 3.8 percent, the labor force has grown by 203, the number of employed rose by 232 and the number of jobless dropped by 28.

Marion County's labor force expanded by 155 over the month to 136,221, the number of those with jobs fell by 244 to 130,843 and the number of unemployed

increased by 399 to 5,378. Since December 2017, when the jobless rate was 4.4 percent, the labor force has grown by 4,307, the number of employed has increased by 4,743 while the number of jobless has dropped by 436.

In December 2018, unemployment rates increased in 61 of Florida's 67 counties, decreased in four and were unchanged in two.

Citrus County, which has long held the state's highest or second highest jobless rate, dropped to the sixth highest rate behind Gulf, Bay and Franklin counties, which continue to recover from Hurricane Michael, and Hendry and Sumter counties. Marion County had the 18th highest rate and Levy County the 28th highest rate among counties.

The Homosassa Springs MSA posted the third highest unemployment rate among Flori-

da's 24 metros and the Ocala MSA continued to hold the fifth highest rate.

Nonfarm employment for the Ocala MSA was 107,300, up by 600 jobs over the month and an increase of 4,400 jobs for a 4.3 percent growth rate compared to the previous December.

In addition to leisure and hospitality and education and health services, other industry sectors that grew faster in the Ocala metro area than statewide over the year were manufacturing (+8.3 percent for 700 new jobs); professional and business services (+5.5 percent for 500 new jobs); and trade, transportation and utilities, (+2.9 percent for 700 new jobs).

Mining, logging and construction gained 400 jobs over the year for a 5.7 percent growth rate.

Financial activities, other services and government industries were unchanged over the year. Information lost 100 jobs.

Due to annual benchmarking that takes place next month, January's preliminary employment summary will be released on March 11.

EAR

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"OTOW also believes that the approach by the county with these EAR Comprehensive Plan Amendments is so exclusively focused on one interest group, that the County has sacrificed developing opportunities for economic vitality and growth for the entire County."

Bouthillier asked during the meeting that OTOW and Golden Ocala be excluded from Policy 2.1.11, which mandates the county to recognize that rural neighborhoods, within or outside the UGB, deserve special protection from the intrusion of urban uses. While the policy was changed, Bouthillier said it does not remove the negative impact on OTOW's vested property rights.

Also, OTOW requested that the Open Space Policy afford credit to developers who set aside open spaces.

Staff recommenda-

KELLEAN K. TRUESDELL, J.D., LLM

Attorney & Counselor at Law

(352) 873-4141 or KelleeanTruesdell.com

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