

Region's jobless rate dips, employment numbers up slightly over the month

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OCALA – The unemployment rate in the CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion region was 4.2 percent in March, 0.2 percentage point lower than February's rate and 0.3 percentage point lower than the region's year ago rate.

According to the preliminary employment summary released today by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, there were 8,377 unemployed in the region, 585 fewer than the previous month and 687 less than in March 2018.

While the region's labor force contracted by 157 over the month to 201,620, it expanded by 1,605 compared to the same time last year ago when the jobless rate was 4.5 percent. Also, there were 193,243 employed in the region in March, an increase of 428 over the month and 2,292 more than March 2018.

Levy County continued to hold the lowest unemployment rate at 3.8 percent, down 0.2 percentage point over the month, but the same rate as March 2018. Marion County followed with 3.9 percent, a drop of 0.3 percentage point over the month and down half a point over the year. Citrus County's rate dropped to 4.9 percent from 5.3 percent over the month, down from 5.2 percent in March 2018.

Florida's not seasonally adjusted rate – a rate that matches how the region's numbers are measured – was 3.3 percent in March, down 0.1 percentage point over the month and 0.4 percentage point less than March 2018. The state's seasonally adjusted rate held at 3.5 percent, down 0.2 percentage point both over the month and year.

Here's how each county compares to the February 2019 employment numbers:

- Citrus County's labor force shrank by one to 47,956, the number of employed increased by 183 to 45,617 and the number of unemployed fell by 184 to 2,339. Over the year, the labor force has grown by 99, the number of employed rose by 253 and the number of unemployed dropped by 154.

- Levy County's labor force decreased by 96 to 17,039, the number of those with jobs fell by 61 to 16,384 and the number of jobless fell by 55 to 655. That's 17 fewer in the labor force, compared to March 2018 when the jobless rate was also 3.8 percent, as well as 17 fewer employed and no change in the number of unemployed.

- Marion County's labor force contracted by 60 to 136,625, the number of those with jobs rose by 306 to 131,242 and the number of unemployed decreased by 366 to 5,383. Over the year, the labor force has grown by 1,523, the number of employed has increased by 2,056 and the number of unemployed has dropped by 533.

Among Florida's 67 counties, Citrus County continued to hold the second highest unemployment rate, tied with Sumter County and behind Gulf County; Marion County moved from 14th highest to a three way tie with Madison and St. Lucie counties for the 13th highest; and Levy County tied with Flagler and Franklin counties with the 16th highest rate.

The Homosassa Springs metropolitan statistical area, which includes all of Citrus County, tied with The Villages for the highest unemployment rate among Florida's 24 metros, while the Ocala MSA continued to hold the fifth highest rate.

Nonfarm employment for the Ocala MSA was 106,800, an increase of 300 jobs over the month (+0.3 percentage point job growth) and 3,000 jobs (+2.9 percent) over the year. The Ocala MSA held the ninth fastest job growth rate among Florida's metros.

The Ocala MSA had the third fastest annual job growth rate compared to all other metro areas in the state in professional and business services with 700 new jobs for a growth rate of 7.7 percent. Government also posted the third fastest annual growth rate at 2.7 percent and with 400 new jobs.

In addition to professional and business services and government, industries that grew faster in the metro area than statewide over the year were: mining, logging and construction, with 500 new jobs (+6.5 percent job growth); manufacturing, 400 new jobs (+4.8 percent); and trade, transportation and utilities with 500 new jobs (+2.1



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