

# Region posts strong jobs gains before impact of COVID-19 hit

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**OCALA** – The unemployment rate in the CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion region was 3.9 percent in February, down 0.2 percentage point over the month and 0.5 percentage point lower than the region's rate a year ago.

The labor force was 203,400, up 2,417 over the year. There were 195,387 employed, an increase of 3,153 compared to February 2019, and 8,013 unemployed, a drop of 736, when the region's jobless rate was 4.4 percent. Compared to January's numbers, there were 1,192 more jobs and 283 fewer jobless.

The Ocala/Marion County metropolitan statistical area posted the second fastest annual job growth rate in manufacturing, at 4.4 percent, compared to all metro areas in the state.

Rusty Skinner, CEO of CareerSource CLM, said that "while we'll undoubtedly see those numbers turn downward in next month's report, as layoffs related to the Coronavirus begin to be felt, it is significant that our region is starting off from a position of economic strength."

Skinner said that the fact that "we experienced labor force expansion across all three counties, both over the month and over the year, and that expansion was fueled by strong jobs gains along with a drop in the number of unemployed is certainly good news, and will hopefully help our region rebound when we hit the other side of COVID-19."

To handle increased demand for reemployment services at a time when, for safety reasons, career centers are closed, Skinner said that staff will be working virtually by phone, email and online to help those who need jobs and businesses dealing with extra stresses during this time of social distancing.

Skinner noted that one area already causing problems due to unprecedented demand is the state's Reemployment Assistance (Unemployment Insurance) program, which is run by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity.

"We are sympathetic to those who have lost their jobs due to COVID-19 and who are frustrated in their efforts to submit claims online," Skinner said. "We would be glad to assist them and have asked DEO to provide us with the access to do so. Unfortunately, our staff, working remotely, is facing the same issues with the system that they are working from their home computers."

Those visiting [www.careersourceclm.com](http://www.careersourceclm.com) can access staff via Live Chat, phone and email options. Additionally, job seekers and businesses hit by COVID-19 can submit streamlined requests for services available on the website via COVID-19 Quick Links and Live Chat box, as well as on Candidates and Businesses pages.

According to February's preliminary jobs report released today by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, Levy County maintained the lowest jobless rate in the region at 3.5 percent, down 0.2 percentage point over the month; Marion County followed with a rate of 3.7 percent, also down 0.2 percentage point; and Citrus County's rate was 4.1 percent, a drop of 0.1 percentage point. Florida's not seasonally adjusted jobless rate – a measure that matches the way local rates are calculated – is 2.8. percent, decrease of 0.2 percentage points over the month and down from 3.3 percent a year ago.

Here's a snapshot of each county's jobs numbers for February:

Citrus County's labor force rose by 382 over the month to 47,676, the number of employed increased by 435 to 45,398 and the number of unemployed dipped by 53 to 2,278. Compared to February 2019, when the jobless rate was 5.2 percent, the labor force has remained virtually the same – contracting by 9 – while the number of employed rose by 171 and there was a decrease of 180 who are unemployed.

Levy County's labor force expanded by 128 to 16,936, the number of those with jobs increased by 154 to 16,346, and the number of unemployed fell by 26 to 590. That's an over-the-year increase of 115 in the labor force, 198 more working and drop of 83 unemployed compared to when the rate was 4.0 percent.

Marion County's labor force grew by 399 to 138,788, the number of those with jobs rose by 603 to 133,643 and the number of unemployed decreased 204 to 5,145. The labor force has expanded by 2,311, there are 2,784 more employed and 473 than fewer



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