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Region's economy shows 'slightly uneven' recovery in September

By Laura Byrnes, APR, CPRC
Communications Manager

CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion

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OCALA – The unemployment rate in the CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion region was 5.8 percent in September, 0.5 percentage point lower than in August and 2.1 percentage point higher than the region's rate a year ago.

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There were 11,814 unemployed in the region, 959 fewer than the previous month but 4,241 more than September 2019.

The region's labor force of 203,649, a modest expansion of 392 since August. There were 191,835 employed regionwide, an increase of 1,351 over the month.

Among Florida's metropolitan statistical areas, the Ocala MSA had the fastest annual job growth rate in government at 12.2 percent and leisure and hospitality at 7.0 percent, as well as the third fastest in mining, logging and construction at 8.2 percent.

The Ocala MSA, which covers all of Marion County, also posted the highest job growth compared to all the metro areas in the state in leisure and hospitality, adding 900 jobs over the year, and the second highest job growth in government with 1,900 new jobs.

According to the preliminary jobs data for September, released today by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, Levy County continues to hold the lowest jobless rate in the region at 4.8 percent, a drop of 0.5 percentage point over the month; followed by Marion County at 5.6 percent, also a decrease of 0.5 percentage point; and Citrus County's rate was 6.8 percent, down 0.4 percentage point from August.

Florida's not seasonally adjusted jobless rate – a measure that matches the way local rates are calculated – was 7.6 percent, the same as the previous month and an increase of 4.7 percentage point over the year.

Here's a breakdown of the region's preliminary September jobs numbers by county:

Citrus County's labor force shrank by 614 over the month to 45,435, the number of employed decreased by 363 to 42,355 and the number of unemployed dropped by 251 to 3,080.

Levy County's labor force expanded by 240 to 16,458, the number of those with jobs rose by 266 to 15,669 and the number of unemployed decreased by 26 to 789.

Marion County's labor force increased by 766 to 141,756, the number of those with jobs increased by 1,448 to 133,811 and the number of unemployed fell by 682 to 7,945.

Rusty Skinner, chief executive officer for CareerSource CLM, said this month's data shows a slightly uneven recovery throughout the three-county region. He noted that Levy and Marion counties show growth in both labor force and employment, factors that contribute to drops in their unemployment rates. On the other hand, he said, Citrus County's reduction appears to be driven by a shrinkage in the labor force.

"September is usually a month where we see data fluctuate, transitioning from summer to 'pre-holiday' hiring," Skinner said. "The impact of COVID 19 on tourism and hospitality is likely the driver behind the Citrus variances."

"It's important to focus on the fact that the jobs are out there," Skinner said. "We just held a very successful virtual job fair in partnership with the Mid-Florida Regional Manufacturers Associations and on November 10 we're holding a three county Paycheck for Patriots Job Fair, which will also be virtual."

He added that job seekers can also take advantage of other virtual services, including the free SkillUp Citrus Levy Marion online job training and certification platform, as well as employment assistance by phone, email, Live Chat and teleconferencing.

In addition, **all career centers continue to be open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. for in-person services; appointments are recommended but no longer required.**

Nonfarm employment in the Ocala MSA was 108,200, up by 1,800 jobs over the month and 1,700 jobs more than in September 2019, for an annual job growth rate of 1.6 percent.

In addition to the aforementioned job growth and growth rates for the Ocala MSA, industries gaining jobs over the year were government (+1,900 jobs); leisure and hospitality (+900 jobs); and mining, logging and construction (+700 jobs).


Industries losing jobs over the year were professional and business services (-700 jobs); education and health services (-400 jobs); manufacturing (-200 jobs); financial activities (-200); other services (-200) and information (-100).

The trade, transportation and utilities industry sector was unchanged over the year.

In September, nonfarm employment in the Homosassa Springs MSA, which includes all of Citrus County, was 31,200, a decrease of 1,900 jobs (-5.7 percent) over

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