

## Plenty of positives to unpack despite November's mixed bag of employment news

### Ocala metro area continues to lead state in key industries

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**OCALA** – The unemployment rate in the CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion region was 6.2 percent in November, up 0.6 percentage point over the month and 2.6 percent higher than the same time last year.

The region's labor force was 205,444, up 1,619 over the month and 2,745 more than in November 2019. The number of those with jobs last month edged up by 340 across the region to 192,799 but fell by 2,564 over the year. There were 12,645 unemployed, an increase of 1,279 compared to October and 5,309 more than the previous November.

According to the preliminary jobs data for November, released today by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, Levy County continues to hold the lowest jobless rate in the region at 5.3 percent, up 0.5 percentage point over the month; Marion County followed at 6.0 percent, an increase of 0.6 percentage point; and Citrus County's rate was 6.9 percent, 0.6 percentage point higher than the October rate.

Florida's not seasonally adjusted jobless rate – a measure that matches the way local rates are calculated – was 6.3 percent, the same as the previous month and an increase of 3.6 percent over the year.

Rusty Skinner, CareerSource CLM's CEO, said it appears that Santa delivered a mixed bag of news in the latest report.

"November's employment data shows a continued positive growth in Marion County, both on a monthly basis and yearly. Growth in both labor force and employment indicate that our key metrics on availability of talent, and on labor market absorption of that talent, are expanding," Skinner said. "However, the level of unemployment indicates a market, that while expanding, is not growing at the rate of new or re-entering employees searching for jobs."

Skinner said that both Citrus and Levy counties show a very slight increase in job seekers looking for opportunities but little expansion in employment, indicating an employment environment that is in a "holding pattern" as it enters the holiday season.

In November, Citrus County's labor force expanded by 282 over the month to 45,748, the number of employed decreased by just 12 to 42,570 and the number of unemployed rose by 294 to 3,178. Compared to November 2019 when the jobless rate was 4.3 percent, the labor force contracted by 1,607, employment dropped by 2,741 and the number of unemployed increased 1,134.

Levy County's labor force ticked up by 39 to 16,662, the number of those with jobs fell by 62 to 15,774 and the number of jobless increased by 101 to 888. Those numbers represent 164 fewer in the labor force, a drop of 512 in the number of employed and an increase of 348 unemployed over the year when the unemployment rate was 3.2 percent.

Marion County's labor force grew by 1,298 to 143,034, the number of those with jobs increased by 414 to 134,455 and the number of unemployed rose by 884 to 8,579. Compared to the same time last year, when the jobless rate was 3.4 percent, the labor force expanded by 2,516, number of employed increased by 689 and number of unemployed rose by 3,827.

When it comes to the positives in November's report, Skinner noted that the nonfarm employment in the Ocala metropolitan statistical area was 110,100, an increase of 1,900 jobs (+1.8 percent) over the year.

The Ocala MSA, which covers all of Marion County, had the fastest annual job growth rate compared to all metro areas in Florida in government at 11.5 percent as well as the highest annual job growth in government, adding 1,800 new jobs over the year for a total of 17,400 government jobs.

For the second consecutive month, the Ocala metro area also had the fastest annual job growth rate in the state in trade, transportation, and utilities at 3.6 percent as well as the highest job growth adding 900 new jobs for a total of 26,100 in that industry.

The Ocala MSA posted the second fastest annual job growth rate compared to all other metro areas in leisure and hospitality at 1.5 percent as well as the second highest job growth, adding 200 new positions for a total of 13,500 jobs in November.

All three industry sectors outpaced statewide growth as did mining, logging and construction which grew at 4.6 percent and gained 400 jobs over the year.

"It is certainly excellent news to learn that Marion County posted the fastest growth rates and highest growth in industries critical to our area, and it is especially encouraging to see leisure and hospitality continue to rebound with the second fastest job growth, and highest job growth in the state," Skinner said.

Industries losing jobs were professional and business services (-500 jobs); education and health services (-400 jobs); other services (-200 jobs); manufacturing (-100 jobs); information (-100 jobs); and financial activities (-100 jobs).

In November, nonfarm employment in the Homosassa Springs MSA, which includes all of Citrus County, was 31,700, a decrease of 1,900 jobs (-5.7 percent) over the year.

Statewide, 59 counties in addition to Citrus, Levy and Marion counties, experienced increases in unemployment rates, four counties saw rates drop and one county's rate was unchanged.

Citrus County maintained the 9th highest rate tying with Hendry County; Marion County held the 20th highest rate; and Levy County tied with Brevard, Franklin, and Manatee counties with the 36th highest rate.

Among the states metro areas, the Homosassa Springs MSA continued to hold the 5th highest unemployment rate and the Ocala MSA claimed the 10th highest. The Villages, which includes a portion of Marion County, had the 7th highest rate at 6.3 percent.

The region's preliminary employment summary for December is scheduled to be released on Friday, Jan. 22.

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