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Volusia, Flagler jobless rates continue to fall

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DAYTONA BEACH - Unemployment in Volusia and Flagler counties declined last month as area employers continued to add jobs.

Volusia saw its jobless rate dip to 5.5 percent, down from 6.5 percent in September 2014 - the lowest since March 2008.

Unemployment in Flagler fell to 6.0 percent, down from 7.2 percent the same month a year ago - the lowest since May 2007, a half-year before the start of the Great Recession, according to data released Friday by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity.

Employers in the Volusia-Flagler area last month increased payrolls, excluding seasonal agriculture-related jobs, to 186,200 for the combined two-county area, up 4,000 from September last year, according to CareerSource Flagler Volusia, the local regional workforce development board.

Tim Hale, co-managing partner and co-founder of Palm Coast technology consulting firm Coastal Cloud, said his company increased its workforce by six workers since Sept. 1 and is scheduled to have two new employees start work next week, boosting its total staff to 80.

"We continue to see strong demand for technology consulting services," he said, adding that it's indicative of the improving economy.

"At the end of the day, we're a discretionary spend item (for businesses)," Hale said, whose company serves customers throughout the country. "When they are spending with us, they do want to become more efficient, but it also means they are expecting to grow."

Coastal Cloud and Daytona Beach-based Synergy Billing, another local firm that's been steadily adding jobs, are set to receive awards at an event in Orlando on Nov. 5 as two of the Florida Economic Gardening Institute's 50 selections this year for Florida Companies to Watch. The awards by the institute, which is also known as GrowFL, recognize second-stage companies that appear set for continued long-term growth.

The VMA manufacturing alliance's ninth annual Manufacturers Showcase at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University included exhibits by a number of manufacturers from Volusia and Flagler counties that have been adding jobs.

Michael Sobolewski, president and chief operating officer at Conelec Electronic Manufacturing in west Volusia County, said the contract manufacturing company has seen steady growth in its business, which has created a need to gradually expand its workforce.

"We've been adding workers all along," he said at the showcase event. "We're trying to hire now."

Conelec is at the DeLand Crossings industrial park near the Interstate 4/State Road 44 interchange.

The number of unemployed workers actively seeking jobs in Volusia County last month declined to 13,088, down 2,613 from September of last year. The number of jobless workers in Flagler dropped 551 year over year to 2,569.

Flagler was tied with Calhoun and Hamilton counties for the state's 19th highest unemployment rate, a vast improvement from the years during the recession through the end of last year when it was consistently among the top three worst rates.

Volusia was tied with Osceola and Jefferson for the state's 30th highest jobless rate out of 67 counties.

Florida's unemployment rate improved to 5.2 percent, down from 5.8 percent a year ago.

Lou Paris, business development and communications manager for CareerSource Flagler Volusia, said of the latest unemployment rates for the two counties, "We expect the number to continue to improve through the rest of the year, as businesses in retail hire temporary positions during the holidays. ... We are seeing more instances where job seekers are becoming more selective in their search. We are starting to see people decline job opportunities if these don't match their expectations."

While the ranks of unemployed are shrinking, the Volusia-Flagler area still has a significant number of individuals who are "under-employed" - working at jobs that are less than full time or at pay levels below what they need or that their skills might merit, according to Paris.

"We suspect we will continue to see a continued flow of this kind of (under-employed) customer at our career centers in the foreseeable future," Paris said.