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Jobless rates fall in Volusia, Flagler

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The unemployment rates in both Volusia and Flagler counties fell in August as employers continued to add jobs.

The jobless rate in Volusia improved to 5.8 percent, down from 7.0 percent in August 2014, tied with Jackson, Pasco and Washington counties for the 30th highest rate in the state, the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity reported Friday.

Flagler saw its unemployment rate dip to 6.3 percent, down from 7.9 percent the same month a year ago, tying it with Calhoun and Miami-Dade counties for 20th highest in the state.

The jobless rates in both counties matched the several-year lows set in June. Unemployment in Volusia is the lowest it's been since April 2008. In Flagler, it's the lowest since May 2007.

The statewide unemployment rate in August fell to 5.3 percent, down from 5.9 percent the same month a year ago.

Flagler at times during the Great Recession had the highest unemployment rate in the state and as recently as last December was third-highest, despite a steady drop in its jobless rate. Since then, its state ranking has steadily improved.

Unemployment in Flagler peaked at 15.2 percent in July and December 2009, according to state data. In Volusia, unemployment peaked at 12.8 percent in January 2010.

The number of unemployed workers declined to 13,756 last month in Volusia, down 3,175 from 16,931 in August of last year, while the number of jobless individuals in Flagler fell to 2,688, down 745 from 3,433 a year ago.

Total non-agricultural employment for the combined Volusia-Flagler area was up 4,100 jobs, compared with August of last year, according to Arva Gathers, a spokeswoman for CareerSource Flagler Volusia, the local regional workforce development board.

"We're continuing to see a positive trend in year-over-year employment numbers," said Helga van Eckert, director of Flagler County's Department of Economic Opportunity. "It's likely the numbers (for Flagler) are reflecting the hiring by Sea Ray (Boats) and Coastal Cloud. Both have been adding substantial jobs to the marketplace."

In Volusia County, **Synergy Billing** has been steadily adding jobs, including three new hires this week and one more set to start on Monday, which will increase its total workforce to 92 employees, said Kahlin Grant, the medical billing company's talent acquisition manager. Grant, herself, is a recent hire, having joined the company at the beginning of August.

Founded in 2006, Synergy Billing has nearly doubled the size of its workforce in the past year, said company spokeswoman Jeannette Duerr, who was employee No. 55 when she began her job on Oct. 1, 2014. Company founder/CEO Jayson Meyer recently announced plans to develop a 25-acre "Google East"-style campus for his growing company in Holly Hill.

Elaine Lambert, who began her job as a credentialing specialist at Synergy Billing on Aug. 3, is a Deltona resident who lost her previous job three weeks earlier when the physician's office she worked for closed. "It was great to find something right away," she said.

Gathers said total employment in education/health rose by 2,100 jobs year-over-year in the Volusia-Flagler area in August. That 5.9 percent increase was the fourth-highest of any metro area in the state last month for that industry sector, according to Florida Department of Economic Opportunity data.

"I would say that the increase is mainly in health as we haven't seen much increase in education," said Gathers, who manages the CareerSource center in Orange City.