

Central Oregon counties see rise in unemployment rates

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

According to a report released by the Oregon Employment Department Thursday, all three counties in Central Oregon saw their unemployment rates increase from January to February. Both Crook and Jefferson counties' rates increased more than expected. Deschutes County (the Bend Metropolitan Statistical Area) had the lowest rate at 5.8 percent, while Jefferson County had the highest at 8.3 percent.

Deschutes County (Bend MSA): The county's unemployment rate increased slightly in February to 5.8 percent, and is still the sixth lowest local unemployment rate among Oregon's 36 counties. The slight increase was normal for the month, as February typically sees the highest rates of the year. The rate was still 0.4 percentage points lower than last February and the lowest for the month on record.

The county added jobs in February at an above normal pace. The gain of 610 jobs was the first over-the-month gain since last August. This is typical as jobs are normally added from February to August and lost from September to January. Natural resources, mining and construction's gain of 160 jobs in February was at near normal levels for the month, along with above normal gains in professional and business services (200) and local government (240). Local education regained its pre-winter break employment levels in February at 3,690.

Both accommodation and food services (â€‘50) and retail trade (â€‘70) continued to shed jobs during the slower winter season. Manufacturing's weakness continues as it shed 30 jobs and has lost 100 jobs in the past two months, all of it occurring in durable goods. Overall manufacturing is down 310 jobs since last June, its most recent high.

The area continued to see strong over-the-year growth â€“ 4.9 percent this February. Expansion continued,

stimulated by natural resources, mining, and construction (9.2%), professional and business services (7.3%), educational and health services (7.2%) and leisure and hospitality (4.6%). Manufacturing (â€‘2.6%) was the only industry to show weakness.

Crook County: The countyâ€™s unemployment rate jumped to 8.2 percent in February, up 0.6 percentage point from January. The increase was more than expected for the month, and put the rate above year ago levels. However the rate was still lower than it was in February 2005 when it was at 8.6 percent.

The county shed an additional 20 jobs in February, a month that typically adds about 30. The February job decline means the county has lost 390 jobs since last September. February typically sees a slight increase in jobs following the normal declines after the holiday season, but this was not the case this year. Both wholesale (â€‘30) and retail (â€‘10) trade saw continued losses in February, along with a slight decline in both state (â€‘10) and local (â€‘10) government.

Outside of trade and government, gains were small with each of the following industries adding 10 jobs: natural resources and mining; transportation, warehousing and utilities; educational and health services; and leisure and hospitality.

The countyâ€™s year-over-year employment growth remained positive in February, however slightly weaker than was seen throughout much of last year. The county added 80 jobs over the year. Industries showing gains include professional and business services (16.7%), leisure and hospitality (14.6%), financial activities (12.0%) and retail trade (7.7%). However, declines occurred in wood product manufacturing (â€‘9.7%), state government (â€‘9.5%) and construction (â€‘2.9%).

Jefferson County: The county's 8.3 percent February unemployment rate was 0.6 percentage point above January's. This was a slightly larger-than-normal increase for February. The county's rate is now slightly above year-ago levels, but lower than it was in 2004 when February's rate was 8.6 percent.

Jefferson County's employment dropped by an additional 90 jobs in February, a month that typically adds about 90 jobs. The unusual decline was primarily due to layoffs in wood product manufacturing (€140), as the industry adjusts to new demands in the U.S. housing market. The declines in February leave the county with 440 fewer jobs than last June, its most recent seasonal high. Typically January and February have the fewest jobs of the year.

Gains were seen in local government (30) and wholesale trade (20), with smaller gains in educational and health services (10) and transportation, warehousing and utilities (10). The only losses outside of wood product manufacturing were in other services (€10) and federal government (€10).

The large drop in manufacturing also shifted the county's year-over-year employment from positive to negative territory for the first time since last September. Employment in February was down 0.3 percent from last February. Contributing to this decline were manufacturing (€11.5%), federal government (€6.3%) and educational and health services (€5.3%). Gains were seen in professional and business services (2.2%), construction (18.2%) and retail trade (10.9%).

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