

County sees growth of workforce; unemployment rate stays low

By Stuart Korfhage
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St. Johns County has seen an increase in its overall workforce in the last year and has experienced an almost equal boost in jobs as the unemployment rate remains low, government data released Friday show.

The monthly release from the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity showed that St. Johns County had the second-lowest unemployment rate in the state during September at 3.7 percent. The was virtually unchanged from August's rate of 3.6 percent.

It's also nearly identical to September 2015 when the county posted an unemployment rate of 3.8 percent.

In the last 12 months, the county has seen its total workforce rise to 117,440 — an increase of more than 4,000 since September 2015. And the number of people employed has moved from 108,817 to 113,071 in that period.

The only county with a lower unemployment rate than St. Johns County in September was Monroe County at 3.2 percent. Hendry County had the state's highest unemployment rate at 11.3 percent.

Overall, Florida's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 4.7 percent in September 2016, unchanged from the August rate, but down 0.4 of a percentage point from a year ago. Rates for individual counties are not seasonally adjusted.

The seasonally adjusted U.S. unemployment rate was 5.0 percent in September.

The number of jobs in Florida was 8,428,000 in September 2016, up 276,300 jobs compared to a year ago. The industry gaining the most jobs was professional and business services (up 59,400 jobs, 4.8 percent). Other industries gaining jobs included leisure and hospitality (up 49,900 jobs, 4.4 percent) as well as education and health services (up 49,700 jobs, 4.1 percent).

The Jacksonville Metropolitan Statistical Area, which includes St. Johns County, had an unemployment rate of 4.6 percent.

Those counties surrounding St. Johns reported relatively low unemployment rates. Clay county had a rate of 4.5 percent, followed by Duval County (4.9), Flagler (5.5) and Putnam (6.1).