



St. Johns County sees unemployment rate fall to 3.6 percent

By Stuart Korfhage
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St. Johns County remained one of the best places in Florida to find a job last month, according to information released Friday by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity.

With an unemployment rate of 3.6 percent in February, the county had the second-lowest rate in the state, behind only Monroe County at 3.1 percent. Individual county rates are not seasonally adjusted.

Florida's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 5 percent in February, unchanged from the January rate and unchanged from a year ago. There were 501,000 jobless Floridians out of a labor force of 10,058,000. The U.S. unemployment rate was 4.7 percent in February.

St. Johns County had an unemployment rate of 4.3 percent in January, the second-lowest rate in the state. That was the county's highest rate since January 2015 (4.4 percent).

The county has consistently been among those with the lowest unemployment rates in the state. In fact, St. Johns County has not seen an unemployment rate higher than 5.1 percent since fall 2013. The highest rate in the last decade was 9.3 percent in January 2010.

In February 2016, the county had a rate of 3.5 percent. Since then, the county's number of available workers rose from 113,778 to 118,837.

That would make sense since the U.S. Census Bureau released information Thursday showing St. Johns County's population increased by 3.7 percent between July 1, 2015, and July 1, 2016, for a total population of 235,000. And with many new developments recently started, there are signs the area's growth is continuing.

For the Jacksonville Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which includes St. Johns County, the unemployment rate was 4.5 percent in February, down 0.1 of a percentage point from a year ago and 0.7 of a percentage point from January.

A press release from the governor's office said the Jacksonville MSA saw an increase of about 25,000 jobs in the last year. The industries with the largest jobs gains in the Jacksonville area over the year were professional and business services with 5,200 new jobs, and education and health services with 5,000 new jobs.

Among the counties bordering St. Johns, Clay had the lowest unemployment rate in February at 4.3 percent. That was followed by Duval (4.8 percent), Flagler (5.3 percent) and Putnam (6.1 percent).

Wages in the area were highest in Duval County. According to a March 17 report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, average weekly wages for all industries in Duval County were \$967 (as of the third quarter of 2016). In St. Johns County, the average was \$776.

Unemployment rates for February

3.6 percent
St. Johns County
4.3 percent
Clay County
4.8 percent
Duval County
5.3 percent
Flagler County
6.1 percent
Putnam County

Source: Florida Department of Economic Opportunity