



St. Johns County has state's lowest unemployment rate at 2.6 percent

By Stuart Korfhage
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Near-record unemployment lows continued last month as St. Johns County saw its rate slip to its lowest level in more than a decade, according to a release Friday from the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO).

Okaloosa and St. Johns counties had the state's lowest unemployment rate (2.6 percent each) in May, followed by Monroe county (2.7 percent) and Walton County (2.8 percent).

It was a small decline for St. Johns County, which had a rate of 2.7 percent in April. A year ago, the rate was 3.2 percent. The total labor force has grown by about 4,000 since then to 126,636.

For this county, 2.6 percent was the lowest rate since October 2006, when the same number was recorded. The lowest modern rate is 2.2 percent, which was recorded in December 1998.

Florida's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 3.8 percent in May, down 0.1 of a percentage point from the April rate and down 0.4 of a percentage point from a year ago. Individual county rates are not seasonally adjusted.

There were 391,000 jobless Floridians out of a labor force of 10.2 million. The U.S. unemployment rate was also 3.8 percent in May.

According to the DEO release, the state gained 180,200 jobs over the year, an increase of 2.1 percent. Nationally, the number of jobs rose 1.6 percent over the year. Prior to September 2017, Florida's over-the-year job growth rate had exceeded or equaled the nation's rate since May 2012.

The industry gaining the most jobs was professional and business services (37,200 jobs). Among the other industries gaining jobs over the year included: leisure and hospitality (37,200 jobs); construction (31,300 jobs); education and health services (24,500 jobs).

For those counties around St. Johns, Clay County had the lowest unemployment rate at 3 percent. The other border counties were: Duval (3.3 percent), Flagler (3.8 percent) and Putnam (4.5 percent).

Hendry and Sumter counties had the highest unemployment rate (5.0 percent) in Florida in May, followed by Citrus County (4.8 percent). Putnam was fourth.