



County still leads state with lowest unemployment rate

By Stuart Korfhage
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St. Johns County maintained its place as Florida county with the lowest unemployment rate in August.

According to a report released Friday from the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, Okaloosa and St. Johns counties had the state's lowest unemployment rate at 2.9 percent each, followed by Walton County and Monroe County (3.0 percent each).

Hendry County had the highest unemployment rate (8.3 percent) in August, followed by Hardee County (6.2 percent) and Sumter County (5.5 percent). Individual rates are not seasonally adjusted.

Florida's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 3.7 percent in August, unchanged from the July rate and down 0.3 of a percentage point from a year ago. There were 375,000 jobless Floridians out of a labor force of 10,244,000. The U.S. unemployment rate was 3.9 percent in August.

Florida's seasonally adjusted total non-agricultural employment was 8,822,200 in August, an increase of 20,500 jobs over the month. The state gained 220,200 jobs over the year, an increase of 2.6 percent. Nationally, the number of jobs rose 1.6 percent over the year.

For St. Johns County, the unemployment rate was virtually unchanged from last month when the rate was 3 percent. A year ago, the rate was 3.4 percent.

As the county has seen solid population growth, its labor force has expanded from 123,770 in August 2017 to 126,311 in August 2018.

This county is basically at full employment right now with more jobs coming. Earlier this month, a representative for Walmart sent out a release saying the new store coming to northern St. Johns County is still looking to hire 200 of the 350 employees it will need. And that's just one of the many new businesses that will soon open in Durbin Park.

Employment remains mostly strong in the counties that border St. Johns. Clay County had the lowest unemployment rate in August at 3.3 percent, followed by Duval (3.7 percent), Flagler (4.1 percent) and Putnam (5.1 percent).