Jobless rate falls

1 in 4 teens still can't find job; companies begin hiring, cautiously

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Andy Trotter, who now has a temporary job, knows he's one of the lucky ones.

But it took a while for that luck to occur. He was unemployed for about 2 ½ years before he found a temporary position with Walmart last month — one that could end in July.

Trotter, 43, worked in retail when he was laid off and had a manufacturing background. He's done the right things in his job search, such as working with Vocational Rehabilitation, taking the WorkKeys program and passing the exams at the gold level, networking and putting out resumes. And he's still looking for a permanent job — at Walmart or elsewhere.

"But this is a start," he said. "It's awesome."

Job seekers "need to be optimistic. You need to be positive. There are definitely jobs. But there is also more competition," said Mike Steinitz, district president for Robert Half International, a professional staffing and consulting firm.

Despite pieces of individual good news, Greenville County's May unemployment numbers jumped to 9.3 percent from 8.9 percent, running counter to the state's jobless rate trend.

Statewide, the unemployment rate dropped to 11 percent from the revised April rate of 11.5 percent, the fourth consecutive monthly decline.

"Across the market, we are seeing companies hiring, however cautiously," Steinitz said. That's often temporary hires, but companies cut so deeply during this recession that many are hiring permanent em-

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across state

Upstate unemployment rates mixed in May

■ Eight of the 10 Upstate counties experienced higher unemployment in May. Union and Cherokee saw declines in their jobless rates.

County	May	April
Union	17.2	17.5
Cherokee	13.5	14.0
Abbeville	12.6	12.3
Greenwood	11.4	11.1
Oconee	11.1	10.9
State	11.0	11.5
Anderson	11.0	10.6
Spartanburg	11.0	10.8
Laurens	10.9	10.1
Pickens	9.4	9.2
Greenville	9.3	8.9



Source: South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce

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ployees.

"We are encouraged by the trends of the last few months while, at the same time, cautious since state and local budgets face serious shortfalls and the national economy remains fragile," said John Finan, executive director of the state Department of Employment and Workforce.

Marion County experienced the highest unemployment rate in May, staying stable at 18.6 percent. Aiken County boasted the lowest rate at 7.4 percent, down from 8.2 percent in April.

The national jobless rate in May also dropped to 9.7 percent, down from the previous month primarily because people were leaving the workforce.

South Carolina reported the seventh-highest unemployment, following Nevada, 14 percent, Michigan, California, Rhode Island, Florida, and Mississippi. North Dakota had the lowest jobless rate at 3.6 percent.

The South Carolina labor force of employed and unemployed workers dropped by 7,686, a continuation of a three-month decline. The labor force is down about 26,500 from a year ago.

"Strictly in terms of the jobless rate, South Carolina has posted a relatively rapid improvement," said Don Schunk, research economist with Coastal Carolina University. "Of concern during this period, however, is that South Carolina continues to see net losses in terms of the labor force. This drop contributed to the decline in the unemployment rate.

"Yes, the jobless rate is moving in the right direction, but a healthy labor market needs to be able to accommodate labor force growth, not decline," he said.

Some sectors of the job market are hit harder than others. An Employment Policies Institute study estimates the average unemployment rate for teens in South Carolina was 28.6 percent in April – the eighth highest in the country.

"More than one in four teens in South Carolina is looking for work without success, and it's not just because of the recession,"

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said Michael Saltsman, EPI research fellow. "This summer, minimum wage mandates are keeping teens from finding a job. It's the least-skilled and least-experienced that are hit hardest. They're missing out on the valuable career skills that come from a first job."

Greenville County saw an increase of 907 in its May labor force — unlike the state's decline. A total of 20,481 people in the county are out of work and actively searching for a job, up 883. This doesn't include workers who have become discouraged and dropped out of the workforce or part-time workers who want to go full-time.

"We still have some minor layoffs from time to time," said Charlie Haneman, area director of the DEW's Greenville office. But the major factor was the increase in Greenville's labor force numbers because "we have people starting to enter the workforce. We've noticed an increase in people searching for work."

Haneman attributed that to positive announcements in the region and to extended unemployment benefits running out.

Greenville County is among the 10 counties with the lowest unemployment rate, although it has been inching higher in the jobless ranking.

Non-farm jobs increased statewide by 22,100 in May, with increases in most of the major categories.

Education and health services jobs dropped by 300 while manufacturing and construction both grew by 800. Education and hospitality jobs increased by 5,500, a reflection of a seasonal trend. Also, government grew by 9,700, with 8,500 of those jobs coming from Census hiring.

Schunk said the total job count in May 2010 was ahead of May 2009 by about 9,100 positions.

"This is the first year-over-year increase in total employment since early 2008," he said.

"However, this gain has been due to an increase in the number of government jobs, particularly the temporary increase in federal government jobs in support of the 2010 Census. Looking only at private sector employment, South Carolina is down by about 6,500 jobs, 0.5 percent, over the last 12 months."