Jobless rate falls on job growth

More companies posting openings

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For the second consecutive month, slightly fewer South Carolina workers were in unemployment lines as the jobless rate dropped to 12.2 percent from a revised 12.4 percent in February.

"This month's drop was due primarily to job growth as opposed to a wave of discouraged workers," said Don Schunk, research economist with Coastal Carolina University.

Greenville County's unemployment rate also declined to 10.3 percent in March from 10.9 percent the previous month, according to the state Employment Security Commission. The county's unemployment numbers dropped to 22,927 people out of work and actively searching for jobs, down nearly 1,100 over the month.

Jan Bowers, a Greenville mother of two who was laid off from a retail position about four months ago, said she now has some hope that her personal situation is improving.

While she has not yet found a job, she has three interviews scheduled next week — the first she's had in about 15 weeks.

"It's been bad," she said. "I've applied and applied and applied. Nothing. No responses until a couple of weeks ago. And now I have the interviews. I don't know how they'll go. The HR person said they had a lot of applications. But at least I have a chance."

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Upstate jobless drops in March

The 10 counties in the Upstate all experienced significant decreases in unemployment in January, a month in the state as a whole also saw a decline in the number of jobless.

County	March%	Feb.%
Union	19.2	20.7
Cherokee	15.4	16.3
Abbeville	14.6	16.1
Oconee	13.0	14.1
Greenwood	12.8	13.7
Anderson	12.5	14.0
Spartanburg	12.3	13.1
State	12.2	12.4
Laurens	11.6	12.7
Pickens	10.3	11.4
Greenville	10.3	10.9

Source: S.C. Employment Security Commission

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JOBLESS

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Pickens County, also at 10.3 percent, and Greenville had the lowest jobless rate in the 10-county Upstate. The highest was Union County at 19.2 percent. Nationwide, the unemployment rate remained steady at 9.7 percent.

"Our job postings are increasing," said Charlie Haneman, area director of the ESC's Greenville office. "I think employers are getting more comfortable with opening positions."

But the competition remains tough, he said. "It's an employer's market. You have 15 to 20 people applying for one job."

Proterra Inc., a manufacturer of cutting-edge electric buses, is hiring 10 people this week as it begins training for its manufacturing to begin in Greenville in July, said Rusty Weston, head of the Greenville operations.

Also, ResMed Corp., a developer, manufacturer and distributor of medical equipment for treating, diagnosing, and managing sleep-disordered breathing and other respiratory disorders, said Friday it plans to expand its operations in Spartanburg County, locating a new distribution facility in the Spartangreen Industrial Park in Duncan. The new warehouse will give ResMed an expanded workforce and operations in the state.

The new facility will serve as the expanded East Coast distribution center for California-based ResMed.

Statewide, Lexington County reported the lowest jobless rate at 8.5 percent and Marion County the highest at 20.7 percent.

The commission estimated that the number of unemployed workers in the state decreased by 5,687 to 264,452. Also, the state's labor force dropped slightly, down 980 to 2,173,260 in March.

Non-farm jobs grew by 15,900 in March. Every major industry sector but manufacturing saw an increase in jobs as the non-farm job count increased by 15,900 positions. Manufacturing dropped 200 jobs while construction jobs were up 900 in March. Leisure and hospitality added 4,500 jobs, followed by retail trade with 3,700 new positions and professional and business services with 3,200 new jobs.

However, "the number of jobs statewide is down by about 15,300 over the last twelve months," Schunk said. "The year-over-year declines in employment have steadily dissipated in recent months. A welcomed positive trend is emerging: on a seasonally-adjusted basis, South Carolina has now posted five consecutive months of net job gains. Since hitting a bottom in October 2009, South Carolina has added an average of about 2,500 jobs each of the past five months."