BUSINESS

More head out for holiday

Lower gas prices, job security behind the increase in travel

By Jenny Munro
STAFF WRITER
jmunro@greenvillenews.com

With gas prices down from earlier in May and less fear of layoffs, more South Carolinians have decided to celebrate Memorial Day by taking to the road or the air than in the past couple of years, according to AAA Carolinas.

An estimated 380,000 South Carolina motorists are expected to travel over the weekend, up 3 percent from 2009, said Brendan Byrnes, AAA Carolinas spokesman. Heaviest travel times are expected to be this afternoon and Monday late afternoon. Another 32,000 expect to fly to their destination for the weekend, which began Thursday. Other travel in the state, including bus, rail and maritime is expected to total 27,000.

"Travel decisions are made at the last minute more than in the past," said David Parsons, president and chief executive of AAA Carolinas. "With gas prices dropping daily, abundant hotel weekend deals and warm weather, staycations are losing their appeal."

"We've decided to make this a family weekend. My parents and brothers will come to my house and we'll cook out and just have a lazy day," said Martha Janney, a mother of three who lives in Taylors. "I thought about the beach, but we don't want to spend that much money."

Erica Booth, 18, and three of her friends, however, do plan a beach vacation.

"It feels like summer already. Besides, I want to have fun with my friends before I start working," she said. "I was lucky and found a waitress job starting the first week in June."

Byrnes said Memorial Day travel numbers of South Carolinians visiting the beach, family or any destination at least 50 miles from home "are still down from 2007."

Increased travel this summer will boost consumer spending in tourist destinations, which will lead to increased hiring among hotels, restaurants, shops and amusement venues.

"The travel industry and all of the related beneficiaries will not see a return to pre-recession boom times, but it will be a significant improvement over the last couple of years," said John A. Challenger, chief executive officer of Challenger, Gray & Christmas Inc., a global outplacement and executive coaching firm.

See TRAVEL on page 9A