11/24/13

Oconee jobless rate drops to 6.3%

BY CARLOS GALARZA-VEVE
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — The number of people holding jobs in Oconee County increased by 387 in October as the local unemployment rate dropped to 6.3 percent, according to the latest labor market information recently released by the state.

Oconee's jobless rate is better than South Carolina's, which ticked up to 6.7 percent, one-tenth of a percent higher than in September, statistics from the South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce show. Nationally, the unemployment rate was at 5.8 percent, one-tenth of a percent lower than in September.

In September, Oconee's unemployment rate stood at 6.8 percent.

Anytime Oconee Economic Alliance executive director Richard Blackwell is asked about the fluctuating jobless rate, he likes to remind everyone the local economy is on the right track when compared to how the situation was a year ago, when the unemployment rate in October 2013 was at 7.5 percent, and prior to that at the height of the recession, when the jobless rate surpassed 14 percent.

David W. Hughes, a Clemson University expert on issues related to the economy, agrees with Blackwell to a degree. Hughes said many times the unemployment rates increase because as the economy improves people start to look for jobs again.

However, Hughes also sides with the view of economic analyst John Quinterno, who works for Chapel Hill, N.C., firm South by North Strategies, and is of the opinion that job growth numbers are not as strong as they need to be.

"The U.S. economy in general continues to not generate employment growth at the levels that are really needed," Hughes said.

October employment in Oconee reached 29,919, which accounted for 387 more people holding jobs than the previous month, according to the new state numbers. The labor force, which is the number of employed and unemployed workers in the county, hit 31,943 in October, or 273 more than in September.

There were 2,024 workers looking but unable to get a job in October, compared to 2,138 in September, state labor statistics showed. The unemployment rate is calculated by dividing the number of unemployed by labor force and multiplying 100.

Pickens County came in with an unemployment rate of 5.7 percent, which is down three-tenths of a percent from September.

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