Oconee jobless rate hits 15-year low

Pickens County figures also drop below 5 percent

BY STEVEN BRADLEY
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SENECA — Oconee's unemployment rate fell to 4.9 percent for September, marking the county's most favorable job figures in more than 15 years.

Not to be outdone, Pickens County also saw its unemployment rate plummet from 5.6 percent just a month earlier to 4.8 percent, according to the latest statistics released Friday by the S.C. Department of Employment and Workforce.

Oconee's rate is down from 5.5 percent both in August and this time last year, and it marked the lowest unemployment rate in the county since it stood at 4.6 percent in March 2001, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Oconee continues to experience strong job numbers across the board with a total employment of 33,654 in September — up more than 160 workers from just a month earlier and more

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than 1,200 from September 2015. The county's total workforce also rose to 35,374.

"It's a great sight to see unemployment dip below 5 percent for the first time in over 15 years, but the priorities around making Oconee a great place to visit, work and invest remain," Oconee Economic Alliance executive director Richard Blackwell told The Journal.

Pickens' total employment figure of 53,894 was also slightly up from August, despite its total workforce dropping by more than 300 workers from a month before. Both of those figures are up from September 2015, however.

And there was good news for the state as a whole. The number of South Carolinians working in September rose to an all-time high, while the state's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate dropped below 5 percent for the first time since April 2001.

South Carolina's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate decreased to 4.9 percent in September from 5.1 percent in August. The state's unemployment rate also dropped below the national rate for the first time since April 2014.

Nationally, the unemployment rate increased from 4.9 in August to 5 percent.

Cheryl Stanton, executive director for the SC-DEW, stressed the need for continued workforce development.

"As South Carolina's businesses continue to grow and prosper, they are providing opportunities for our state's citizens," she said in a statement. "I am excited to see that a record number of people are working now than at any time in our state's history, and our unemployment rate has fallen to a level we have not experienced in the last 15 years.

"While there are more than 58,000 unfilled jobs across the state, we are continuing our work to develop a pipeline of skilled workers to address the state's workforce needs of our current and future employers."

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