Oconee jobless rate lowest in 13 years



FILE

The number of workers holding jobs in Oconee grew to almost 29,700 in April, according to the latest labor market report.

BY CARLOS GALARZA-VEVE
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WALHALLA — Unemployment in Oconee County has dropped to 5.1 percent, the lowest level in 13 years.

The latest labor market report released by the state shows that in April the number of workers holding a job in Oconee increased to 29,693, while the number of job seekers dropped to 1,593. The favorable trend allowed Oconee to improve on the statewide jobless rate of 5.3 percent.

Oconee Economic Alliance officials noted the significant improvement in the county's labor market, stating that the unemployment rate has not been this low since March 2001, according to data from the Federal Reserve Bank in St. Louis.

"Oconee County is an anomaly as you look around the country — our unemployment rate is going down while the number of people in our workforce is at record highs," Oconee Economic Alliance executive director Richard Blackwell said.

The national unemployment rate currently

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stands at 6.3 percent.

Oconee is one of 18 counties with a jobless rate of 5.1 percent or lower. Neighboring Pickens and Anderson counties have a jobless rate of 4.3 percent.

Saluda and Lexington counties are tied with the lowest unemployment rate in the state at 3.9 percent. Marion County has the highest unemployment at 9.5 percent.

In April, unemployment in Oconee dropped by 0.6 percentage points from the previous month, and was 2.3 percentage points lower than at this time a year ago, when unemployment stood at 7.4 percent. Oconee has added almost 700 jobs since April 2013.

'Our current economic climate is a testament to our local industries and small businesses that are finding success here in our community.'

Richard Blackwell
Oconee Economic Alliance executive director

"Our current economic climate is a testament to our local industries and small businesses that are finding success here in our community," Blackwell said.

Cheryl Stanton, executive director of the South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce, said the number of workers has increased in nine consecutive months.

"South Carolina continues to reach historic employment levels," Stanton said in a statement.

carlos@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6686
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