STATE JOBLESS RATE

Figures reflect a four-year low; Greenville up slightly

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South Carolina's unemployment rate declined for the fourth consecutive month and hit a four-year low in November, dropping to 8.3 percent.

The Department of Employment and Workforce said last month's jobless rate was down from 8.6 percent in October.

Marion County had the state's highest unemployment rate at 15.8 percent. Lexington County had the lowest rate at 6.3 percent, DEW figures show.

Greenville County's jobless rate rose to 6.6 percent in November from 6.4 percent from October, but it still was the second-lowest figure in the state. In November 2011, the county's unemployment rate was 7.4 percent.

Last month, Spartanburg County's rate rose to 8.2 percent from 8.1 percent and Anderson County increased to 8 percent from 7.9 percent.

Oconee County rose to 8.6 percent from 8.4 percent and Pickens County increased to 7.5 percent from 7.3 percent.

Across South Carolina, the number of unemployed dropped by 6,400. The number of people working increased by 9,700.

The unemployment rate has dropped 1.5 percentage points since November 2011.

"This month is especially encouraging as the number of our fellow South Carolinians finding employment increased, and the number of unemployed fell to the lowest level of the year," said DEW Executive Director Abraham J. Turner. "Looking back at the year as a whole, we have seen an increase of approximately 33,000 jobs statewide."

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The national unemployment rate last month was down to 7.7 percent from 7.9 percent in October.

Economists with TD Bank Group said jobless rates have largely continued to decline since their summer peaks, with rates in the Upper and Lower South Atlantic, including South Carolina, nearing four-year lows.

DEW officials said Friday that South Carolina's nonagricultural employment — not seasonally-adjusted — increased 7,100 to more than 1.8 million since October. In the last year, the number of jobs in

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the state was up 33,200, or about 1.8 percent, while the number of U.S. jobs grew by 1.4 percent.

Job creation, the most important measure of economic progress in South Carolina, is expected to grow 1.2 percent in 2013, according to forecasts presented this month by Doug Woodward and Joseph Von Nessen, economists in the Moore School's Division of Research at the University of South Carolina.

Von Nessen said the state will see growth in the coming year from industries that extend beyond manufacturing.

"Though manufacturing has largely been responsible for South Carolina's economic recovery, we've started to see other industries expand this year, and we expect more diverse growth in 2013,"

Von Nessen said.

Gains are expected in transportation and warehousing, health care, education and even construction, an industry that has been hard hit during the recession, the USC economists said.

"We're pleased to see our state's unemployment at a four-year low, but we understand there is work to do for us to make sure that number continues to drop," Gov. Nikki Haley said in a statement.

In South Carolina, increased retail hiring in November pushed up trade, transportation and utilities employment by 5,500 workers, or 1.5 percent. Government employment increased by 3,100 jobs, education and health services climbed 1,200 and manufacturing increased by 1,100.

The leisure and hospitality industry lost about 2,200 jobs since October and professional and business services employment was down 1,400.