State jobless rate in Dec. drops to 6.5%

Greenville County tied for lowest figure in South Carolina

By Med Kinnard
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South Carolina's unemployment declined slightly during the final month of 2014 to 6.5 percent, state officials said Tuesday.

That was down from 6.7 percent in November, the state Department of Employment and Workforce said.

Agency officials said the estimated number of South Carolinians working rose by more than 7,200 people to set a record of nearly 2,060,000. In the past year, state officials say the state's labor force has gone up by nearly 34,000. Almost 33,000 of those people have found jobs.

Nationally, December unemployment went down 0.2 percentage points to 5.6 percent.

Unemployment rates fell in most of South Carolina's 46 counties. The rate was highest in Marion County, at 11.9 percent. Greenville, Lexington and Saluda counties were tied for the state's lowest jobless rates, at 5.0 percent.

Professional and business services posted the largest month-to-month gain, increasing by 3,300 jobs. Over the past year, that sector has gained about 18,200 jobs, officials said. Leisure and hospitality jobs were down by 2,300 since November 2014, but the sector is up by 7,100 compared to a year ago, officials said.

Gov. Nikki Haley said she was happy to see the rate go down but stressed the importance of job training initiatives, something she mentioned in her recent State of the State address.

"Our new workforce training initiatives are going to expand opportunity in every part of South Carolina and keep our state on the move," Haley said in a statement.

Last week, Haley discussed Succeed, which she said will expand on the state's existing training programs for large corporations such as Boeing and BMW, by helping more residents and smaller companies. Haley gave few details beyond saying the state will pay upfront for classes to learn a certain skill a company needs, which the worker can repay after getting the job.