Nonfarm jobs added in the state last year:

31,100

Leisure and hospitality jobs added in the state last year:

9,800

Trade, transportation and utilities jobs added in the state last year:

6,900

Source: S.C. Department of Employment and Workforce

State jobs expected to grow

Gains in construction, health likely to fuel hiring

By David Dykes
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In the last year, manufacturing companies have given the state's employment a lift, but economists and jobs experts believe gains in 2013 will be widespread, with sectors such as health care and even construction, hard hit during the recession, also providing momentum.

In the Upstate, Greenville and other counties should benefit from gains in information technology and administrative services employment, said Dean Jones, director of the Greenville County Workforce Development program.

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Some gains in construction, retail and other industries will be cyclical, he said. And some companies are hesitating to hire workers until lawmakers in Washington, D.C., work through federal budget issues, Jones said.

"But I'm going to say that we're going to see a pretty steady growth over the next year," he said.

At League Manufacturing in Greenville, company officials have hired a packaging engineer and two production workers since December. That brought the work force to 21, and the company expects no additional hiring before early in the fourth quarter, said Barbara League, the chief executive officer.

The company, which opened its doors in 1917 as a wholesale lumber brokerage, now uses CNC, or computer numerical control, machines and computer-aided design, or CAD, in its woodworking operations.

League officials say use of CNC machine centers allows employees to produce complex parts in high volumes. Most of the parts fall into ar-

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chitectural, packaging and store fixture categories but a large number of products still are used in the textile and conveyor industries, company officials say.

It's representative of a changing workplace, experts say.

"In today's workplace, change is rapid, frequent, and expected," said John Cioffi, author of "The Winning Manager's Playbook." "Businesses are in constant flux, customers are global and ever-changing, markets quickly emerge and wane, and product life cycles are shorter than ever."

South Carolina's unemployment rate went up a tick in January, the same as the national average, with data showing that Palmetto State employers added 26,840 net jobs in the past year.

The state's Department of Employment and Workforce said the jobless rate rose from a revised 8.6 percent in December to 8.7 percent in January, mirroring the nation's snapshot showing unemployment up from 7.8 percent to 7.9 percent.

Greenville County's jobless rate of 7 percent, up from 6.7 percent, was second best in the state to Lexington County's 6.8 percent. Pickens County's rate of 7.7 percent, up from 7.5 percent, was No. 2 to Greenville in the 10-county Upstate.

For Greenville County, the data showed a slight improvement in the past 12 months, from an unemployment rate of 7.3 percent in January 2012. While 16,315 were without jobs in a labor force numbering 224,942 a year ago, 15,894 were looking for work in a labor force of 15,894 in January, according to DEW.

The agency reported that nonfarm jobs in the state were up 31,100 in 2012, with the leisure and hospitality (+9,800), trade, transportation and utilities (+6,900) and government (+6,500) sectors leading the way.

Manufacturing, which showed strength as the state began recovering from the recession in 2011, added just 3,000 total jobs last year and lost a net 400 jobs in January, according to DEW.

In a recent report, Fitch Ratings said the Upstate's economy has diversified from its former manufacturing base to one with a broad mix of services and products.

Leading sectors of economic activity include professional and business services, trade, health care, education, government and tourism, the officials said.

But Fitch officials said Greenville County employment trends have been uneven in recent years. Following a recession-induced 5 percent drop in 2009, employment registered two consecutive years of modest growth, Fitch officials said.

However, growth stalled in 2012 as jobs were virtually even with 2011, due in part to a series of layoffs announced during the second six months of 2011 and 2012, the officials said.

Fitch officials said re-

cent spikes in capital investments and building permit valuations are positive signs that could lead to an eventual resumption in job gains.

Manufacturing remains an important component of the local economy, accounting for approximately 13 percent of Greenville metropolitan statistical area employment, Fitch officials said.

Branching out from its traditional focus on textiles and non-durable goods, manufactured products include industrial robots, electronic components, automotive products, gas turbines, and pharmaceuticals, the officials said.

Following an 11 percent decline in employment between 2008 and 2010, manufacturing jobs in the MSA have inched up over the past two years but remain well below pre-recession levels, Fitch officials said.

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 in December 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 should see growth 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 construction, the USC economists said.