State may have turned JOBLESS CORNER



PATRICK COLLARD / Staff

Scan Source employees work in Greenville, a region that, along with Charleston, is leading the rest of the state in recovery. An analyst said they are among the strongest local economies in the nation.

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Rebound ranks among best in region

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South Carolina appears to be on a roll as unemployment numbers in April dropped and job creation numbers increased.

The state reported an April jobless rate of 9.8 percent, reflecting four months of decline that is one of the fastest drops in the Southeast. The rate has dropped 1.1 percent from December 2010 and 2 percent since 2009.

Although Greenville County's rate ticked up to 7.8 percent in April from 7.7 percent the month before, it reported the fourth-lowest jobless rate in the state. Pickens County's rate dipped slightly to 8 percent from 8.1 percent.

Marion County has the highest jobless rate at 18.7 percent. Lexington County has the lowest at 7.3 percent.

"I am encouraged that the South Carolina employment landscape appears to have turned the corner," said John Finan, executive director of the Department of Employment and Workforce.

Employers created 11,700 new nonagricultural jobs in April, though the numbers aren't seasonally adjusted.

Industries with the greatest growth

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Unemployment results mixed

Four counties experienced a decrease, four an increase and two remain steady.

County	April %	March %
Union	15.3	15.5
Cherokee	12.7	12.7
Abbeville	11.1	11.4
Greenwood	10.8	10.7
State	**9.8**	**9.9**
Laurens	9.7	9.6
Spartanburg	9.6	9.5
Oconee	9.5	9.7
Anderson	9.0	9.0
Pickens	8.0	8.1
Greenville	7.8	7.7

Source: SC Dept. of Employment and Workforce

SUZIE RIDDLE/Staff



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ican Source employees work in the company's Greenville office. The county's unemployment rate increased to 7.8 percent in April, still the fourth-lowest rate in the state.

JOBS

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were leisure/hospitality at 6,600, retail trade at 2,100 and manufacturing at 1,600. The state's labor force expanded to 2.2 million.

When the numbers are seasonally adjusted, South Carolina had a decrease in employment of 3,800, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Seasonal adjustment of employment means that normal seasonal fluctuations are smoothed out.

"Normally, we add a certain number of jobs in the month of April," said Mark Vitner, senior economist with Wells Fargo Economics Group. "We didn't make as many jobs last month."

That decline in seasonally adjusted jobs doesn't mean the economy is faltering, he said, and the trend is encouraging.

Vitner said the economies of Greenville and Charleston are leading the rest of the state in recovery and are among the strongest local economies in the nation.

Eight states posted jobless rates above South Carolina's in April – Nevada, 12.5 percent; California, 11.9 percent; Rhode Island, 10.9 percent; Florida, 10.8 percent; Mississippi, 10.4 percent; Michigan, 10.2 percent; Kentucky, 10 percent; and Georgia, 9.9 percent. The national rate for the month was 9 percent.

Job growth continues to lag in many urban communities, the president of the National Urban League said.

Marc Morial, speaking in Greenville this week, said the nation's jobless rate is at "unacceptable levels" and is "much higher in black and brown communities" and urban locations.

"Our goal when it comes to jobs is that every American has access to a good job that pays a decent wage with good benefits," he said.

South Carolina manufacturers should continue to add jobs in the months ahead, if a prediction by the Manufacturing Alliance rings true. The trade group said manufacturing production should outpace the overall economy with 6.2 percent growth in 2011 and 4.2 percent growth in 2012. It forecasts the sector will add 288,000 jobs in 2011 and 374,000 jobs in 2012.

The Department of Employment and Workforce said that other trends show the economy recovering. Average weekly initial claims for state unemployment benefits dropped to pre-recession levels from a high of 8,637 in 2008.

Currently, initial claims are averaging about 3,700. Also, the average weekly payment for state jobless benefits declined to a little less than $8 million this month from a high of nearly $21 million in 2009.