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IN-DEPTH COVERAGE: JOBS & ECONOMY

Butler County unemployment rate declines

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By Chelsey Levingston

Staff Writer

BUTLER COUNTY — The county's unemployment rate dipped in August to 6.6 percent, the 40th consecutive month of year-over-year declines in the countywide jobless rate.

Currently the number of people living in Butler County who are unemployed, and looking for work, is an estimated 12,600 people. As of August 2012, 12,900 Butler County residents were considered unemployed, making the unemployment rate at that time 6.8 percent.

Not since April 2010 has the unemployment rate increased from the year before. The unemployment rate in Butler County has been on the decline for more than three years, but is still considered by economists to be high.

The updated figures come from Tuesday's release of local area employment statistics by Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. Unemployment rates are based on a household phone survey that asks someone if they are working or not, and if they're not, whether they are searching for a job. Unemployment rates do not consider people who are out of work and not searching for a job.

These are preliminary estimates, and could be revised in the future when more information becomes available.

Employment numbers for the county, city and metro area are not seasonally adjusted.

Butler County employment rose to 178,200 people working, up from employment of 177,700 in August 2012, according to Ohio Job and Family Services.

Tuesday's report also shows August unemployment in the whole 15-county Cincinnati metropolitan, including Butler and Warren counties, to be sitting at 6.7 percent, down from 6.9 percent a year ago.

Metro level employment is now 1,020,200 people working, down 6,700 from 1,026,900 people working in July. However, employment increased by 1,500 jobs year-over-year from August 2012 employment of 1,018,700, also according to the state report.

"The most noteworthy thing about August in general...is people go back to school," Benjamin Johnson, spokesman for Ohio Job and Family Services, said.

High school and college students leave the labor force, shrinking the number of participants when comparing July to August.

Looking year-over-year, job growth is not keeping up with Cincinnati area population growth, said Michael Jones, research assistant professor for University of Cincinnati's Economics Center.

Unemployment rolls are down, but the region needs to add 3,000 to 4,000 jobs on an annual basis to generate job growth that exceeds population growth, Jones said.

"We're still treading water," Jones said. "I think uncertainty is creating a little hesitancy in the job growth market," including uncertainty about health care reform, other national issues such as the Federal Reserve's bond-buying program, and local issues such as whether Cincinnati will have streetcars or not.

Butler County's two largest cities — Hamilton and Middletown — had unemployment rates in August of 7.3 and 7.2 percent, respectively. Both cities saw rates drop from August 2012 levels of 7.4 and 8.1 percent, in order. Fairfield's unemployment rate in August was 6.3 percent, unchanged from a year ago.

County data is not seasonally adjusted, and year-over-year comparisons are more accurate when comparing data that has not been adjusted for seasonal employment fluctuations. Unemployment rates are not reported for townships.

The state government agency reported Friday that Ohio's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 7.3 percent last month, compared to 7.2 percent the same time the year before.

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