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BERKSHIRE ECONOMY

Local unemployment rate below 4%; lowest since '07

Seasonal hiring helps extend trend of strong job numbers

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PITTSFIELD » The Berkshire County unemployment rate continued its downward trend in August, dropping below 4 percent for the first time since November 2007.

The local jobless rate fell to 3.9 percent last month, a slight drop from the 4.2 percent registered in July, according to figures released Tuesday by the state Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development.

But the local unemployment rate has dropped almost a full percentage point since June, and two full percentage points since January when the rate was at 5.9 percent. Berkshire unemployment was 4.7 percent in August 2015.

The state's seasonally unadjusted unemployment rate is 3.8 percent, more than a percentage point lower than the national rate of 4.9 percent.

The last time Berkshire unemployment was this low, 3.7 percent in November 2007, there were 5,000 more people in the local workforce than there are now, said Heather Boulger, the executive director of the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board.

"It means more people are either retiring or leaving the area," she said.

Last month's drop shows that employers are either hiring more people, or that county residents have gotten frustrated and dropped out of the job market altogether, she said.

"But most companies that we speak with have job opportunities, and are looking for people that work," she added.

The BerkshireWorks Career Center is holding its annual job fair at the Crowne



EAGLE FILE

A worker clears a table at the Red Lion Inn in Stockbridge. Monthly decreases in local unemployment were due to substantial job gains in the leisure and hospitality sector.

Plaza Hotel in Pittsfield on Wednesday.

Despite last month's drop in the county's overall unemployment rate, the Pittsfield metro area shed 100 jobs between July and August, a decrease of 0.2 percent.

However, over the last 12 months, the Pittsfield metro area has added 800 jobs, an increase of 1.8 percent.

The most recent monthly decreases in county unemployment were due to substantial job gains in the leisure and hospitality sector due to the summer tourism season.

The monthly job decrease in the Pittsfield metro area is due to the summer tourism season winding down.

"It just shows full employment over the summer time," Boulger said. "In September there will probably be an increase because people are going back to school and the seasonal hiring will be over."

Regarding the 12 month increase,

Boulger said the majority of those new positions are in the education and health care, trade and transportation, financial services and manufacturing sectors.

Jobs in the leisure and hospitality sector have remained the same over the last 12 months, she said.

Job increases in those other sectors are "showing good signs for the economic well being of Berkshire County, especially in manufacturing and trade," Boulger said.

Unemployment in all three of the county's labor market areas dropped last month, dipping below 4 percent in Pittsfield, and 3 percent in Great Barrington. Unemployment is 5.0 percent in the North Adams area.

The numbers released on Tuesday are not seasonally adjusted which means they take into account seasonal construction jobs and positions in the travel and tourism industry.