

# Business

Wednesday, December 21, 2016 | The Berkshire Eagle | BerkshireEagle.com

## BERKSHIRE COUNTY

# Jobless rate at lowest mark in 16 years

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**PITTSFIELD** — The Berkshire County unemployment rate has been falling gradually since June, but now it has reached its lowest level in 16 years, according to a state agency.

The local jobless rate fell just 1/10th of a percentage point in November, but that slight drop caused the rate to dip below the 3 percent mark. Berkshire unemployment is now 2.9 percent, the lowest it's been since the rate reached 2.6 percent in December 2000, according to figures released Tuesday by the state Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development.

To put that number into more perspective, Berkshire unemployment was 5.2 percent 12 months ago.

The Berkshire unemployment rate is currently low enough that it has fallen into the range that economists consider to be full employment, said Heather Boulger, the executive director of the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board.

"From what we're hearing, companies are having trouble finding the workers that they need," Boulger said. "Anyone who wants to work now should be able to find employment in their field because there are so many opportunities. When unemployment is this low, it's a job seekers market because employers are almost desperate to find the right worker because there's less employees to choose from."

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The state's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate is also 2.9 percent, but is 2.6 percent when not adjusted for seasonality. Massachusetts experienced the largest over the year drop in unemployment in the nation last month, as the rate dropped a full 2 percent from November 2015, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The national unemployment rate is 4.6 percent.

Unemployment in the Pittsfield metro area is 3 percent, down 2.3 percent from December 2015. Employment growth in the Pittsfield metro area over the last 12 months was .2 percent, below the state average of 2 percent.

### SEASONAL FACTORS

The county's total labor force, and the number of employed both dropped significantly last month, with the labor force dropping by almost 300 workers and the amount of employed falling by 250.

Boulger attributed the drop in both those figures to the number of county residents working part-time seasonal jobs, and those have dropped

out of the workforce entirely. Part-time employees are not included in the monthly labor force numbers that are released by the state.

"I would think it's mostly seasonal," she said.

The number of county residents receiving jobless benefits is 1,890, the lowest number in at least 12 months. There were 3,385 county residents receiving jobless benefits in November 2015 when the total labor force contained 1,820 more workers.

Local job growth was experienced last month in the education services, leisure/hospitality, private sector, and mining/transportation/utilities sectors. There was no change in the goods, trades, information and finance and government sectors. A decline of .1 percent was experienced in both manufacturing and professional services.

Unemployment dropped slightly in the Pittsfield and North Adams labor market areas last month, but remained at 2.2 percent in Great Barrington.

The jobless rate also fell slightly in the cities of North Adams and Pittsfield. Unem-

ployment in North Adams is 4.2 percent, three percentage points lower than the 7.3 percent registered in November 2015. The unemployment rate in Pittsfield is 3.3 percent, two percent lower than the 5.6 percent of 12 months ago. Statewide, the local unemployment rates decreased in 18 labor market areas, increased in four and remained the same in two others. Six of the 15 areas for which job estimates are published recorded seasonal gains in November. The Pittsfield area is one of three that had no changes.

There were 1,372 Berkshire County job openings posted on JobQuest Tuesday. Both highly skilled and low skilled positions are listed.

The unemployment figures released on Tuesday are not seasonally adjusted. The unadjusted rates and job estimates for labor market areas reflect seasonal fluctuations and may show different levels and trends than the statewide seasonally adjusted estimates.

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## Money & markets



**S&P 500**  
Close: 2,270.76



**Nasdaq composite**  
Close: 5,483.94

