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Jobless rate hits record low

Few unemployed in Brevard, but job-growth rate lowest in Florida

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FLORIDA TODAY

Brevard County's unemployment fell to an all-time low of 2.7 percent in April, state labor officials reported Friday.

Despite that, Brevard's job-growth rate during the past year was among the lowest of the state's metropolitan areas.

The unemployment rate in Brevard dipped from 2.8 percent in March and 3.7 percent in April 2005, according to preliminary statistics released by the Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation, the state's labor agency.

The 2.7 percent rate is the lowest since the modern system for such record-keeping began in 1980.

The low unemployment rates are "a signal that the U.S. economy is doing well, and the state of Florida is doing even better," said David Scott, a professor of finance at the University of Central Florida's College of Business Administration in Orlando. "Unemployment can't go much lower than it is now."

The unemployment rate -- which does not include people who have stopped actively looking for work -- has been falling across Florida, a state that has led the nation job creation, according to the labor agency.

One of those new jobs recently was snapped up by Indian Harbour Beach resident Deborah Humphries, a food server and one of about 125 new employees at Mimi's Cafe, which opened this month at The Avenue Viera.

She said if people are willing to work, it's relatively easy to find a job in Brevard.

"No job is easy, especially this one," she said. "But there's some good money to be made."

Florida added 255,000 nonagricultural jobs between April 2005 and April 2006 -- an annual growth rate of 3.3 percent, statistics show.

In comparison, the number of nonagricultural jobs in Brevard grew from 211,400 in April 2005 to 214,400 in April 2006 -- a gain of 3,000 jobs, with an annual growth rate of 1.4 percent.

"Brevard is a sluggish job market right now," Scott said. "Melbourne is not keeping up because of the nature of what's there. You have a great corporation in Harris, but, beyond that, there isn't a whole lot of happening."

During the past year:

Construction, mining and natural resources added 1,400 jobs; leisure and hospitality added 1,100; and professional and business services added 800.

Manufacturing lost 1,500 jobs.

- In Indian River County, the unemployment rate dropped to 2.9 percent in April, down from 4.6 percent in April 2005.
- Statewide, the unemployment rate fell to 2.8 percent in April, down from 3.8 percent in April 2005.
- Nationwide, the unemployment rate fell to 4.5 percent in April, down from 4.9 percent in April 2005.

The statistics are not seasonally adjusted, which means they include gains and losses of seasonal jobs.

Dan LeBlanc, chief operating officer at the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex, said the attraction plans to add about 40 management and hourly-wage positions to its current staff of 650 for the summer.

Attendance at the Visitor Complex is down slightly from last year.

But LeBlanc is hoping business picks up with the Liberty Bell 7 space capsule exhibit from May 26 to Sept. 10, as well as the planned launch of the space shuttle Discovery in July.

"There's nothing like a summer launch to help tourism," he added.
