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Report: Jobs in tech sector bouncing back

Florida's six clusters showing uptick in workers, exports.

By Chris Kauffmann/Staff Writer

High technology may be getting hot again and there are indicators that Florida is one of the ovens heating the industry.

The number of high-tech jobs in the United States increased by nearly 190,000 positions or 3.4 percent between January of 2004 and June 2005, a new report by the American Electronics Association shows.

This brings the total number of those employed in the sector to 5.72 million, according to the study, which is based on information from the federal government.

While a state-by-state breakdown of jobs for just 2004 won't be ready until later this year, officials say there is reason to believe Florida may be outperforming the country as a whole.

Florida had an 18 percent increase in the

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volume of high-tech exports last year, compared to a national increase of 12 percent, says Matthew Kazmierczak, vice president of research for the Washington, D.C.-based electronics association.

Overall, Florida was the third-largest exporter of high-tech goods last year after California and Texas, he adds.

While the state may not have an image of being a "cyber state," it actually ranked fourth in the number of high-tech jobs in 2003 with 259,000. California, Texas and New York were the states with more high-tech jobs.

"One of the reasons Florida has struggled to portray itself as a high-tech state is because the industry is so spread out," Kazmierczak says. "Florida has six clusters (of companies), including West Palm Beach, Orlando, Tampa and Fort Lauderdale. Most states only have one or two clusters."

What jobs are high tech?

Part of what makes good data hard to come by is that the definition of what exactly is a high-tech job can vary with how the company making the report on its numbers views itself, economic development officials say.

As well, they say, high tech is not a tracked category on a monthly basis and, as a result, such jobs can appear in categories that may not, on the face of it, seem high tech, such as hotels/leisure.

That being said, David Scott, executive director of UCF's Dr. Phillips Institute and a professor of finance, notes that a lot of high-tech jobs fall into the professional and technical-services category.

He says that for the 12-month period ending in August, the metro Orlando area added 3,900 jobs in that sector, which was a 6.8 percent year-to-year increase. That brought the total number of jobs in that category to 61,400.

"Looking at imperfect data, we're having reasonable increases, but where those jobs are, I don't know," Scott says.

In all likelihood, those jobs are probably in the high-tech areas for which the Orlando area is already known.

While Tampa has developed a reputation as a mecca for medical device manufacturers and Brevard County has earned one for aviation and aerospace businesses, the Orlando area is known for companies specializing in modeling and simulation, lasers and optics, and, to a lesser degree, biotechnology.