

Nation's payrolls grow by 274,000 Several industries show marked gains in hiring

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The nation's payroll soared beyond expectations last month as employers added 274,000 jobs, bolstering hopes that the long-lumbering labor market is undergoing solid expansion.

The U.S. Labor Department also reported Friday that the nationwide unemployment rate held steady at 5.2 percent in April.

"This is a good report for the nation and a good report for Orlando," University of Central Florida economist David Scott said. "This is an upbeat report that underscores the good trends in Orlando and suggests those trends will continue for the next two to three months at least."

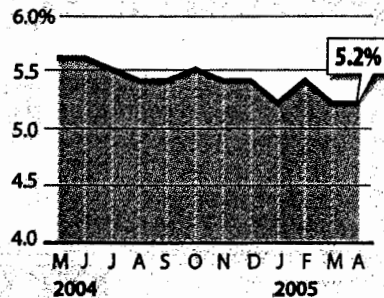
Metropolitan Orlando has been a Mecca for job seekers for more than a year now. It has one of the strongest employment markets in Florida, which is churning out new jobs faster than any other state.

April's growth in the U.S. work force was a marked improvement from the 146,000 new jobs created in March. Economists also were heartened to see that revised figures showed employers had added 93,000 more jobs in February and March combined than the government had previously estimated.

U.S. UNEMPLOYMENT

Monthly unemployment rate for the past year:

Seasonally adjusted



SOURCE: Department of Labor

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Payroll gains were widespread. Retailers, bars and restaurants, health-care providers, construction companies and financial services all showed employment rising.

Factories, however, lost jobs for the second straight month. Clothing, automobile, food and furniture makers were among the manufacturers where employment declined.

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Central Florida employers, who have been coping with a tight labor market for months, say it is increasingly hard to find the right job candidates.

"It's very tough to find people who fit our profile," said Greg Clendenin, CEO of Middleton Pest Control in Orlando. "We're having to spend a lot of money on recruiting. We're even using some of our radio airtime that we would normally use for advertising to recruit workers."

Joni Thompson, a recruiter with Snelling Personnel Services in Altamonte Springs, said employers are facing a double problem: finding new workers and retaining old ones.

"We are in the middle of an impending crisis," Thompson said. "Employers are going to have to work much harder on

Orlando labor market is getting tighter, employers say

employee retention as the labor market gets tighter. This is very quickly becoming an employee's market."

Alex Rosario, who graduated from Rollins College with a master's degree in business administration last weekend, said he had a number of job prospects before deciding to accept a position as a sales associate in the Maitland office of Trammell Crow, a national commercial real estate brokerage.

"I don't know many people in my program who had trouble finding jobs," said Rosario, 22. "Almost everybody in the program who graduated last Saturday had a job this week."

Employers in a number of fields say they are having trouble filling slots. Xytrans, an Orlando high-tech company, has found it difficult to find engineers.

"With the uptick in the de-

fense industry, we are dealing with competition from Lockheed Martin and companies in Melbourne and Tampa that are also looking for workers," said Rob Howald, Xytrans vice president of engineering. "Times have changed. In 2000 and 2001, it was no problem finding the right people. It's more difficult now."

So far, the job-creation rate has had little effect on wages, which have been rising slower than the inflation rate. But a tightening of the labor market could put upward pressure on wages.

On Wall Street, the Dow Jones industrials gained just 5.02 Friday to close at 10,345.40 as the stronger-than-expected jobs report made investors fret about the prospects of more aggressive rate increases by the Federal Reserve.

To combat inflation, the Fed

boosted interest rates on Tuesday by one-quarter percentage point to 3 percent. It was the eighth increase of that size since the Fed began tightening credit last June. The Fed is expected to keep pushing up rates through much of this year.

But the increase in payrolls suggests that the higher cost of borrowing hasn't slowed the economy yet.

"The April number was a great number — better than anybody expected," said Hank Fishkind, president of Fishkind & Associates in Orlando. "Orlando is continuing strong, with the tourism market remaining strong and the airport staying very active."