

CENTRAL TEXAS

Region posts job growth, drop in unemployment rate

Local business leaders praise diversified economy as Austin again lone Texas city to add jobs

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The national job market remains challenging, but Central Texas continues to create new jobs, according to figures released Friday by the Texas Workforce Commission.

The region added jobs at a 0.4 percent rate during April, and its unemployment rate fell to 5.8 percent from 6.2 percent in March. A year ago, the rate was 3.5 percent.

The percent growth rate translates into 3,480 new jobs between April 2008 and April 2009.

For the third month in a row, Austin was the only large Texas city to add jobs. Dallas lost jobs at a 2 percent annual rate last month, and its 6.7 percent unemployment rate was the highest among large Texas cities.

Local business leaders were encouraged by the report but remain cautious.

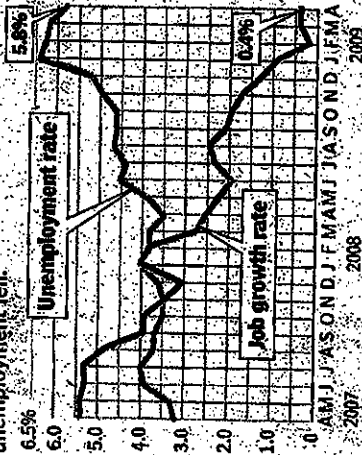
"We don't know if we bottomed out yet," said Dave Porter, senior vice president of economic development for the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce. Although some expected to see larger job declines by now, "it hasn't happened yet."

Porter said the Austin trend reflects hard work over the past six years to diversify the region's economic base. Since 2004, 147 companies from a wide range of industries have moved here, he

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Austin-area employment

In April, Austin job growth held steady, but unemployment fell



Source: Texas Workforce Commission
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2007 2008 2009

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Senior vice president of economic development for Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce

JOBS: Service sectors rise, as do manufacturing losses

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added. "What we try to do is protect ourselves during these downturns," Porter said. "The fact that we are working hard to diversify the economy is paying off. You can only tell it's a downturn like this."

Last month, the Austin-area job market was buoyed by gains in the leisure and hospitality sectors ahead of the summer vacation season. The professional and business services sector, which includes jobs in the legal arena, also saw gains from March to April, along with retail trade.

But Central Texas is losing manufacturing jobs at an accelerating rate. With cutbacks by Dell Inc., Freescale Semiconductor Inc. and other employers, the region has lost 9.4 percent of its manufacturing jobs in the past year.

Last month, the unemployment rate in Texas remained unchanged at 6.7 percent, well below the national rate of 8.9 percent, the commission said. However, that's still above the state's 4.6 percent jobless rate posted in April 2008.

Last month, the state lost 39,500 jobs. Texas has lost 173,900 jobs in the past year.

"While the Texas unemployment rate remains substantially lower than the national rate, it is of real concern that Texans who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own are having a difficult time finding employment," Tom Pauken, chairman of the state commission, said in a statement.

"Continued unemployment claims remain much higher than a year ago," he said.

Nationwide, eight states have unemployment rates above 10 percent, and rates in many others are rising. cgrisales@statesman.com, 912-5933

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State unemployment rates in April

Eight states have jobless rates higher than 10 percent, led by Michigan at 12.9 percent.



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

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