

As summer approaches, jobless figures fall to 10.7 percent

Employment
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SANTA CRUZ — With the approach of summer, hiring has picked up in agriculture and tourism, dropping the unemployment rate in Santa Cruz County to 10.7 percent in May, according to state figures released Friday.

That's down from 12 percent in April, but much higher than 6.1 percent a year ago.

Statewide unemployment is 11.2 percent; nationwide it's 9.1 percent.

County jobs overall reached 101,100, up from 96,800 in April, but down from 105,400 a year ago, before the recession surfaced locally.

Most sectors of the local economy saw no change other than the seasonal job growth. "The only loss was 100 jobs in manufacturing," said Janice Shriver of the state Employment Development Department said. "All the rest was steady."

Between April and May, the county saw an increase of 3,600 farm jobs, nearly matching the average increase of 3,800 jobs during the past 19 years.

"You're seeing a big jump, primarily in the berry industry, bush berries and strawberries," said Jess Brown of the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau. "Weather dictates when a jump occurs."

Another 300 jobs were added

JOBS IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

Data show a seasonal bump in jobs between April and May.

Industry	April 2009	May 2009	Change
Total	96,800	101,100	4,300
Total Farm	7,000	10,600	3,600
Total Nonfarm	89,800	90,500	700
Government	22,800	23,200	400
Leisure & Hospitality	10,800	11,100	300
Trade, transportation & utilities	16,800	16,900	100
Mining, logging and construction	3,600	3,600	0
Information	1,000	1,000	0
Financial Activities	3,300	3,300	0
Professional & Business Services	9,500	9,500	0
Educational & Health Services	12,600	12,600	0
Other Services	4,000	4,000	0
Manufacturing	5,400	5,300	-100

SOURCE: California Employment Development Department

in leisure and hospitality in May, as the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, motels and restaurants geared up for the tourist season.

Part of the bump was due to the 100-room Holiday Inn Express opening with a staff of 19 and Pacific Blue Inn, a bed and breakfast with nine rooms, which plans a grand opening at 5 p.m. Thursday.

Paul Zech of the Santa Cruz Hotel Group said he did not add employees but gave them more hours in May.

The county also saw an increase of 400 government

jobs between April and May.

Federal employment dropped by 100, while state jobs other than education rose 100 and local government added 400 jobs.

Shriver did not have a breakout explaining where jobs were added but local jurisdictions typically add seasonal workers for the summer.

As for the future, there is a mix of good news and bad news. IHOP opened this week in Capitola hiring a staff of 70, the Aquarius restaurant at the Dream Inn in Santa Cruz will reopen Thursday and Whole Foods

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is hiring for its Capitola store to open next month. On the other hand, Gottschalks department store is about to close and lay off 59 employees in Watsonville and 100 more in Capitola; Seagate plans to lay off 104 people from its Scotts Valley headquarters in mid-July.

The construction sector, hit hard by the recession, is down 1,200 jobs compared to May a year ago, but the federal economic stimulus money is starting to trickle in.

The state Water Board announced \$485,135 in funding Friday for the Santa Cruz County sanitation district to replace sewer lines at the Aptos Esplanade. The project is expected to create or retain about 15 jobs.

"The State Water Board identified these shovel-ready projects so we can both get people back to work and protect water quality," said Charlie Hopkin, chairman of the State Water Board.

The number of jobs in real estate and in finance remains unchanged from April; each segment is down 100 jobs from May a year ago.