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BUSINESS

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Local unemployment declines

County bucks state trend

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As the statewide unemployment rate inched higher in March, more locals found jobs, bringing Santa Cruz County's rate to 7.6 percent, down from 8.1 percent last month and 8 percent in March 1999.

Ray McDonald, Santa Cruz County

labor market analyst for the state employment development department, said every industry sector measured by the department — especially hospitality, business services, health and social services, manufacturing and trades — contributed to local gains.

The good news is that it gives people opportunities in a number of industries. Last month, McDonald said the county's labor force numbered 141,000. Of that number, 130,300 were employed, leaving 10,700 without jobs.

McDonald said some service job gains could be related to the good weather the area has experienced.

Statewide the unemployment rate inched higher in March after hitting a three-decade low in February.

"We gear up around the summer time," he said. "Generally that begins in April, but we've had excellent weather so people may be moving forward a little early with summer hires and activities."

Statewide the unemployment rate inched higher in March after hitting a three-decade low in February.

The state's March jobless rate hit 4.7 percent, up from 4.5 percent in Febru-

ary, according to the California Employment Development Department.

Despite the rise, March's unemployment was less than a year earlier. Also, surveys of employers and households showed the number of jobs in the state hit an all-time high with a record 16.5 million Californians working in March.

The largest gains came in business

services and restaurants and bars.

The number of people unemployed in California in March reached 808,000 — 28,000 more than February but down 43,000 since March the year before. Of the unemployed, 535,300 were laid off, 70,500 left their jobs voluntarily and the rest were new entrants or returning entrants to the job market.

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The Associated Press contributed to this story.