

Area employment continues upward trend

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SANTA CRUZ — The county's preliminary April employment figures, which include a large jump in seasonal farm jobs, continue the gains seen over the past several months, according to a local employment market expert.

"This month it's consistent with the gradual improvement in the labor numbers, so far," said Janice Shriver, a labor market consultant for Santa Clara Valley.

The data are prepared by the Employment Development Department, Labor Market Information Division, and are not adjusted for seasonality.

The nearly 63 percent increase in farm jobs since March "contributed to the overall picture," said Shriver.

"The farm jobs was the largest increase over the month, of 2,200 jobs," she said.

Still, farm jobs were down 12.3 percent compared with last year at this time, going from 6,500 in April 2004 to 5,700 in April 2005.

The decrease could be attributable to weather, according to John

Eiskamp, a Pajaro Valley berry grower and board member with the county Farm Bureau.

Though Eiskamp doesn't grow strawberries, he said, "I think the biggest issue is maybe the strawberries are late getting started this year, and the weather has damaged a lot of the early crop of strawberries."

The labor force in the county grew from 140,400 in April 2004 to 144,700 in April 2005, an increase of 3.1 percent.

Employment grew from 129,600 in April 2004 to 135,200 in April 2005, an increase of 4.3 percent.

Unemployment dropped from 10,800 in April 2004 to 9,600 in April 2005, a decrease of 11.1 percent. The unemployment rate in the county was 6.6 percent in April, above the state rate of 5.2 percent.

The national unemployment rate for April was 4.9 percent.

Total jobs in all industries increased from 99,200 in April 2004 to 100,200 in April 2005, an increase of 1 percent.

The computer and electronic product manufacturing sector saw a jump of nearly 12 percent compared with last year, going from

Labor force data for Santa Cruz County

	APRIL '04	MARCH '05	APRIL '05	PERCENT CHANGE	
				Month	Year
Labor force	140,400	143,500	144,700	0.8%	3.1%
Employment	129,600	132,100	135,200	2.3%	4.3%
Unemployment	10,800	11,400	9,600	-15.8%	-11.1%
Unempl. rate	7.7%	8.0%	6.6%		

Source: Employment Development Department, Labor Market Information Division.

1,700 jobs in April 2004 to 1,900 in April 2005, which Shriver said is "not a large gain, but it's good. Again, it's consistent with that gradual improvement."

Areas that saw slight losses over the year included general merchandise stores, dropping 13.3 percent, and transportation, warehousing and utilities, falling 14.3 percent.

Arts, entertainment and recreation had a 10 percent increase in jobs since last year and nearly a 16 percent increase since last month, which Shriver attributed to school breaks and the Easter season.

"Especially in Santa Cruz it's normal to see that number increase over the summer,

because there's such a strong tourism sector there," said Shriver. "Usually venues for tourists will increase hiring from March through June."

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