



Economic Development Report February 2013

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Pickens Unemployment Rate Better than most Counties in Region

The latest unemployment figures from the Department of Labor are from the Preliminary December 2012 report and indicate the rate in Pickens is better than most in the 15 county Northwest Georgia Region. Although the accuracy of the statistics have been questioned due to the perceived high number of individuals that were self-employed and not eligible for Unemployment, the data is accurate from a comparative standpoint because all areas are subject to the same measurement criteria.

Per the December Report, Pickens County has a labor force of 14,843, of which 13,627 are employed, resulting in a 8.2% unemployment rate. This is the fourth lowest rate in the Region. Catoosa County has the lowest at 6.0% and Chattooga has the highest at 12.8%. The rates in surrounding counties in the Region are as follows: Gilmer- 10.1%, Murray- 12.2%, Gordon- 9.7%, and Bartow -8.6%.

Every county with the exception of Whitfield had an increase from the revised November 2012 Report that ranged from a low of .3% to a high of 2.5%. Pickens County was just above the lowest number and showed a .4% increase which equates to 1,216 unemployed as compared 1,110, or 106 individuals. Walker County lost 692 jobs, the greatest number in the NW Region.

Job Creation off to a Strong Start

Many view the number 13 as unlucky, and believe it or not there are many high-rise office buildings that have no 13th floor- which can be verified by looking at elevators floor buttons. Contrary to this, in Pickens County the number 13 may be very lucky based on the strong start this year in job creation.

Most new employment growth in any area is fueled by existing businesses and our community is no exception. Restaurant Interiors is a local company that a few short months ago was located in a 6,000 square foot building with about 10 employees. Propelled by opportunities generated by an aggressive remodeling program at a national restaurant chain, this company recently moved into the 77,000 SF building on Holly Street in Jasper and have steadily added jobs.

They currently employ over 70 people and have gone to two shifts to keep up with demand for the products they manufacture. They also stock many other items and have construction crews that can perform complete interior and exterior remodels in a very short period of time. This minimizes the lost sales that are incurred when a store is closed for renovation and has made Restaurant Interiors the top choice of many of the largest franchisees. Employment is projected to grow throughout the year and could possibly even double.

Tourism Gets a Boost from New Committee Chair and Rotary Club

The Pickens County Chamber of Commerce Tourism Committee has gotten a boost from new Chairman, John Frech, as well as from support by Rotary and Club President Amelia McIntyre. Bringing many new faces to the table as well as encouraging past Committee Members to return has resulted in a large and diverse group with a wide range of skills.

John's effort began with a comparison between other areas with robust tourism and Pickens County & the City of Jasper. Documenting points of interest, establishments, events, and locations with natural beauty has provided a solid foundation for the Committee.

Although reaching an initial conclusion not unlike previous efforts which indicate that tourism "product" development is needed in Pickens County, the first steps will focus on devising a strategy to better market existing assets through the creation of a slogan and a communications plan.

Question of the Month:

Why don't we get suppliers or customers of existing business to move here?

Citing Huntsville, AL as an example of success, this question was recently raised at a public meeting. The reality is that rarely does a company locate to a specific location solely because of one customer. Exceptions are typically very large production plants such as Kia in West Point or more recently, Caterpillar in Athens.

In Huntsville, the very large government aerospace and defense facilities have allowed specialized contractors and related industries to cluster in the area. Specific sites include Redstone Arsenal and NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center.

In Pickens County we do not have facilities like these but we still continually seek new opportunities based on existing businesses and refer to this our Allied Industry Strategy. We also market many other attributes such as proximity to metro Atlanta, ease of doing business, rail transportation, and quality of life. This effort has resulted in the location of new company and the construction of a purpose built manufacturing facility in Jasper, which is probably the first that has gone up in over 25 years.

In the past, clustering occurred in the marble industry and continues to this day. One of the best examples is probably the Blue Ridge Marble and Granite Company in Nelson. The plant closed in 2003 but was reopened under new management in 2006. Marble blocks are quarried at Polycor Georgia Marble in Tate and transported to the plant for cutting, carving, and finishing.