Florida unemployment rises in July with loss of 3,300 jobs

By Emily Roach
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Summer doldrums hit the state in July, as Florida lost 3,300 jobs and the unemployment rate bumped up to 8.8 percent.

The unemployment rate rose 0.2 percent from June’s 8.6 percent, the Department of Economic Opportunity reported Friday, as the state reversed course on its track to recovery. The rate had improved or stayed flat for 12 months. The national rate also rose in July from 8.2 to 8.3 percent.

“If you look at what’s happened to the recovery nationally from last year to the first half of this year, we’ve seen a pretty sharp deceleration of growth,” said University of Central Florida economist Sean Snaith.

Snaith said he expects little change in the coming months as businesses and individuals deal with the uncertainty of the political climate and the global economic picture. Of special concern, he said, was the rise in the unemployment rate even though workers left the labor force.

But the state and national economies “still have a pulse,” he said.

Palm Beach County’s unemployment rate rose 0.4 percent to 9.8 percent, Martin County rose 0.8 percent to 9.8 percent and St. Lucie County rose 0.7 percent to 12.6 percent. Those numbers are not adjusted for seasonal factors, but should not be compared with the overall state figure.

When Debbie Yurasek of Boca Raton moved here from Ohio five years ago, she joined the Florida workforce at its highest point of employment. She and many co-workers were laid off from a law firm last month, she said.

“I’ve probably put out 100 resumes” since she was laid off, she said, and has heard “nothing.”

Florida was not alone in its decline. The unemployment rate was up in 44 states, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. Florida has had the greatest rate reduction the past year, dropping 1.8 percent, along with Mississippi and Nevada. Eleven states have higher unemployment than Florida.
The job loss leaves the state in the hole 1,800 jobs since the beginning of the year, though June numbers were revised up by 3,400 to reflect a gain of 12,400 jobs.

Gov. Rick Scott emphasized that private sector employment has grown since he took office. Private sector jobs grew by 81,500 in the last year, but fell by 37,700 in July. Government jobs fell 10,700 from the prior year and were down 7,200 from June, according to the state employment report.

“While the unemployment rate can vary from month to month, Florida continues to see positive private sector job growth,” Scott said in a news release.

Palm Beach County gained 3,900 jobs in the past year, but job growth did not keep pace with the state. The state’s employment rose 1 percent while the county’s rose 0.8 percent.

“Area employment is traditionally slower in the summer months and this seasonal trend is reflected in the July results,” said Steve Craig, president and CEO of Workforce Alliance, a state-chartered jobs agency in Palm Beach County.

The county was the only one in the state to gain construction jobs over the year (1,100) and shared the highest total of government jobs created (1,500) with the Tampa Bay metro area.

However, leisure and hospitality jobs continued to be down (by 6,800) compared to the prior year, which is at odds with gains the tourism sector has shown, according to local experts. The county and state have asked federal officials in charge of the jobs surveys to explain the contradiction. Economist William Stronge, professor emeritus at Florida Atlantic University, has said he believes the decrease is a data issue and not a true loss of jobs.

Workforce Alliance is part of an effort to employ local workers at area country clubs. The agency is screening potential workers and held an information session this week that Zack Gracius attended. The West Palm Beach resident said he’d like to try the hospitality field.

“I haven’t seen too many jobs out there,” Gracius said, who is trying to find a permanent, full-time job while his music and entertainment business is slumping.

But he is hopeful. It took a year to find a job after he was laid off from a local bank early in the recession. But his brother, who was unemployed for 2 1/2 years, recently got a job, and several friends who were laid off have found new employers.

“I think it’s moving better,” Gracius said of the labor market.

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Palm Beach County employment gains, losses in past year

Leisure and hospitality -6,800 jobs
Professional and business services +3,700 jobs

Education/health services +2,800 jobs

Trade/transportation/utilities +2,200 jobs

Construction +1,100 jobs

Government +1,500 jobs

Financial activities -900 jobs

Manufacturing +300 jobs

Other services +100 jobs

Information -100 jobs

Source: Department of Economic Opportunity, July 2012 compared to July 2011