South Florida Sun-Sentinel.com

Job growth is expanding in West Palm Beach, Miami

By Donna Gehrke-White

3:48 PM EDT, October 10, 2011

The number of jobs is expanding in Miami but not growing as fast in Palm Beach and Broward counties, according to new projections released Monday by a leading economist.

New jobs in Miami-Dade County are expected to grow by about 3 percent by the end of the year, and will rise by 1.5 percent in Palm Beach County, Wells Fargo Securities senior economist Mark Vitner said.

Broward will be lucky to see even a 1 percent gain, because the county doesn't have the same level of Miami-Dade's international tourism and trade -- two key industries driving the job growth in South Florida, said Vitner, a nationally known economist who tracks regional and U.S. economic trends.

State jobless figures show Miami-Dade has more ground to make up on the jobs front, with higher unemployment rates than Broward and Palm Beach. Miami-Dade unemployment rate is 12.2 percent with Palm Beach’s at 11 percent and Broward at 9.5 percent.

South Florida's job market has strengthened in the last year, thanks to an increase in tourism and retail, Vinter added. Miami-Dade was helped by its international tourism buying goods while Palm Beach and to a lesser extent, Broward, had more tourists come from other parts of the United States, he said.

Other economists generally support Vitner's projections.

"The forecast seems reasonable and consistent, at least from what we have seen," said Sean Snaith, an economic professor and director of the Institute for Economic Competitiveness at the University of Central Florida.

Palm Beach County has been adding jobs in every sector, said William B. Stronge, professor emeritus of economics at Florida Atlantic University. Stronge, who has extensively studied Palm Beach County's economic trends, said the job market has been improving this year throughout South Florida, even with this summer's fears of a second U.S. recession.

"At least we turned the corner and are creating jobs," Stronge said. "The economy is coming back -- not at its peak. But things are much better."

Overall, the number of jobs continues to grow throughout the state -- but at a far more sluggish pace than expected, Vitner said in a conference call to Florida media.
South Florida's housing prices may be bottoming out. But banks are expected to step up their efforts to foreclose on non-paying owners: The state has a large number of people who haven't paid for a year or more, Vitner said.

He added that South Florida has a "huge shadow inventory" of homes whose owners are more than 90 days delinquent in their loan payments. About a third of Broward and Palm Beach home loans are at least three months late, according to data supplied during the media conference call.