



Austin area job numbers up 1.8 percent in March

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Austin area employers added jobs at a 1.8 percent annual rate last month, the Texas Workforce Commission reported Friday.

The 13,900-job gain from March 2010 to last month brought the region's job count to 777,600, the highest it has been since December 2008, when there were 779,000 jobs in the area.

The unemployment rate slipped slightly from 6.9 percent in February to 6.8 percent. It was 7.2 percent in March 2010.

Job markets in Austin and other large Texas cities have been picking up along with the improving economy, but it hasn't been all smooth sailing.

In Austin, BAE Systems Inc. said Friday that it cut 65 jobs, about 10 percent of its local workforce, because of slowing defense spending.

However, the company said the Austin campus has been designated to become a manufacturing center of excellence, which is expected to create as many as 200 jobs either late this year or early next year.

In Houston, United Space Alliance, the primary contractor for the space shuttle, said Friday that it will cut 750 to 800 employees in Texas, primarily in Houston, because of the end of that program.

However, the Houston area had 16,900 more jobs last month than a year earlier, a 2.1 percent gain.

Dallas was ahead by 14,700 jobs, a 2.7 percent gain.

Statewide, employers added 37,200 jobs in the 12-month period, a 2.4 percent change. Unemployment fell to 8.1 percent from 8.2 percent in February.

Government hiring was light, both in Central Texas and statewide, as cities, state agencies and school districts confronted shrinking budgets that are expected to lead to more layoffs soon.

In Central Texas, governments added 500 jobs in the 12-month period, a 0.3 percent gain.

Government, which includes state, federal and local governments and public schools, remained the biggest employment sector, accounting for more than 1 in 5 area jobs.

In the Austin area, the biggest private-sector percentage gains were trade, transportation and utilities, up 2.9 percent; professional and business services, up 3.8 percent; and a broad "other services" category, up 3.9 percent.

Courtesy of JB Goodwin