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Unemployment in most Northeast Ohio counties down from same time a year ago

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Unemployment in most Northeast Ohio counties is down slightly from a year ago, strengthening a trend begun earlier this year, figures released Tuesday by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services show.

Summit was the only local county with a higher jobless rate in May: 10.1 percent, up from 9.4 a year earlier.

Even Lorain County, which has consistently had one of the highest unemployment rates in area, showed a decrease. The May rate fell to 9.4 percent from 10.5 percent a year earlier. Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Medina and Portage posted more modest decreases.

Temporary U.S. Census jobs and an increase in manufacturing contributed to the rosier employment picture, said George Zeller, an economic research analyst in Cleveland. From at least the time the national recession began in December 2007 until earlier this year, the predominant pattern was substantial year-to-year increases in unemployment rates.



“Things are consistently better than last year,” Zeller said of the latest figures. “Things are improving, but last year was the worst year for employment since the 1930s, so the improvement has to be put into perspective.”

Zeller sees several signs that the economy is still struggling. For example, new unemployment claims data released last week show that layoffs are still higher than what they need to be for unemployment to begin falling substantially. Also, sales tax receipts in Cuyahoga, for

example, show improvement over last year, but they still rank among the worse collection months in 20 years.

“Things have not improved enough to say that the recession has ended,” Zeller said.

Aaron Grossman, president of Alliance Staffing Solutions in Independence, said the local hiring picture is improving. He first began noticing an uptick in the fourth quarter 2009. Grossman said the active job postings his company is managing are up 51 percent for the first five months of 2010 compared

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with the same period a year ago.

“The biggest jump we have seen is in our manufacturing sector,” he said. That showed an 89 percent increase from the first quarter last year to the first quarter this year.

“On the professional side, we have not seen the same increase,” he said. “It has been more blue collar -- in the production facility. People are building things again.”

He said these positions tend to be temporary with the prospect of permanent work.

Economists often look at temporary hiring as a sign that the economy is rebounding. Grossman said there are at least two reasons why business is good for him.

“When the recession first started, the recruiters were cut at a lot of these companies,” he said. “When things started to pick up, they might not have had the infrastructure to do the same type of hiring as before.

“Then there are a lot of companies that don’t know where the economy stands, so they’ll bring people on straight temporary with no knowledge of whether they will be hiring permanently or not,” Grossman said. “It is a type of wait-and-see type of atmosphere.”

Clinton County had the highest unemployment rate in May at 16.7 percent. Delaware had the lowest at 7.2 percent. County figures are not seasonally adjusted.

Ohio’s unemployment rate in May was 10.7 percent, or 10.1 percent not seasonally adjusted. A year earlier it was 10.3 percent and 10 percent not seasonally adjusted.

The U.S. jobless rate in May was 9.7 percent.