



## Service industry fueling job surge

By Tammy Griffin

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CONCORD - Cabarrus County is one of 84 counties in the state that saw a drop in the unemployment rate in December, according to the N.C. Employment Security Commission's latest statistics.

The 3.9 percent rate is down nearly .5 percent from November, when it was 4.3 percent, and the December rate was the lowest the county experienced in 2005. Unemployment is down almost 1 percent from December 2004, when the rate was 4.7 percent. In July 2003, Pillowtex laid off more than 6,400 workers and Cabarrus County's unemployment rate soared to 9.6 percent in August of that year, which was the highest unemployment rate for the county between January 2000 and December 2005.

Watauga County has the state's lowest rate for December 2005 at 3 percent and Rutherford County has the highest unemployment rate at 8.3 percent.

The rates reflect the number of people who have filed with the ESC and who are actively seeking a job.

"I do believe jobs are picking up," said Carolyn Mays, manager of the Cabarrus Employment Security Commission on Kannapolis Highway.

Mays said the service industry, which includes restaurants, hotels, retail and other personal service jobs, seems to be hiring the most people.

"This area is growing and more retail and food establishments are coming here," Mays said. "All of that is contributing to the growth in jobs and the number employed."

Cabarrus' unemployment rate is nearly 1 percent lower than the state rate of 4.7 percent.

"We are starting to see the statistical effects of months and months of hard work by Gov. (Mike) Easley to add jobs across the state," said ESC Chairman Harry E. Payne Jr.

"It often takes some time for people to fill jobs announced weeks or months earlier. Additional good news is that employment is near an all-time high."

Among the employers currently offering jobs through the ESC are the U.S. Army, the Kannapolis Police Department, Big Elm Nursing and the City of Concord.

Mays said an average of 500 clients visit the Cabarrus ESC office each week. The average age is 35-40 years old and the busiest time of year is during the spring and summer months. All who visit the ESC, however, are not unemployed. "Some of them are looking for a job change," Mays said.

Persons in search of jobs in the medical or law related field are often the hardest to find jobs for, Mays said, because those fields don't usually post openings with the ESC.

Many employers have Web sites where potential employees can fill out an application. Several Cabarrus employers require potential employees to apply at the ESC.

"We pre-screen applicants per employers' requirements and only send persons who meet their qualifications," Mays said of the services ESC offers employers.

"We can also do testing for spelling and typing, which saves employers time and helps narrow down the search field."

Employers do not pay a fee for the ESC's services. It is paid for by employers' taxes.

Mays said it is hard to predict what the unemployment rates will be in coming months but believes the rate in Cabarrus County will not change significantly.

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