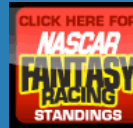




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County jobless rate worsens slightly in June

Steve Fogarty

Lorain County's jobless rate increased to 11.5 percent in June, up from 11.4 percent in May, according to figures released by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.

Lorain saw a bigger jump, rising from 13.1 percent in May to 13.5 percent in June.

The news was slightly better in Elyria, which saw a drop in unemployment, from 12 percent in May to 11.9 percent in June.

The county's 0.1 percentage point rise in unemployment from May to June matched the increase in the national jobless rate, which edged up from 9.4 percent in May to 9.5 percent last month.

"Such small changes in the figures — neither up nor down — reflect no real change at all," said Hirschel Casper, an Oberlin College economics professor. "But the fact that they're not getting any worse could be reason to think we've seen the worst."

Statewide, June's seasonally adjusted jobless rate stood at 11.1 percent, up from 10.8 percent in May.

The number of Ohioans out of work in June was 662,000, an increase of 15,000 over May. The state had 383,000 unemployed in June 2008, when the jobless rate was 6.4 percent, according to ODJFS figures.

Even though the unemployment rate increased only slightly throughout the county, it's not much comfort to social service agencies that continue to be pressed for demands on their services.

"Right now, we're seeing calls going through the roof," said Nicolle Pierse, executive director of Family Promise of Lorain County Inc., a nonprofit agency that provides temporary emergency shelter to area families through a network of 20 churches.

"Our clients are having a more difficult time securing employment," Pierse said. "We're definitely seeing more people coming in who have gotten laid off."

Pierse said that some of the people her office is seeing have been without work since the winter months, but they are just now seeking help. "It's just now catching up to some people ... being evicted and becoming homeless."

Because emergency shelter is provided by only one church at a time, the program can provide help to a maximum of 14 people at any one time, Pierse said.

"It depends on family makeup how many separate families that is. We stay very small, based on the premise that we can devote more case managers and resources to three to four families to get them into housing, instead of trying to work with 30 to 40 families at a time," she said.

Just this year, Family Promise began working with the Housing Service Program of Lorain County. Administered through the Nord Center, the program works to find long-term housing for families facing eviction or foreclosure. Family Promise processes requests for help for people in Elyria and northern Lorain County.

"We anticipate a very busy fall and winter again," Pierse said.

Delaware County continued to have Ohio's lowest unemployment rate of 7.5 percent, while Williams County, in extreme northwestern Ohio, had the state's highest jobless figure, 17.6 percent. Huron County, which had the state's highest unemployment for months, improved a bit, with 15 percent unemployment for June.

Contact Steve Fogarty at 329-7146 or sfogarty@chroniclet.com.

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