

WEEKEND WAVE

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Friday Economic Roundup

AREA NEWS

Jobless rates recede

By GARY ROBERTS, STAFF WRITER CHARLOTTE SUN

As an improving economy rolls on, jobless numbers across the region are following suit, dropping significantly in one month and over the past year.

The unemployment rate in Charlotte County fell to 5.1 percent in December, down from 5.6 the previous month. In December 2013, the county's jobless rate was 5.7 percent. The local figures are not seasonally adjusted.

Similarly, monthly unemployment numbers in Sarasota and DeSoto counties also fell lower. Sarasota's jobless rate has fallen all the way to 4.9 percent, following November's 5.3 percent rate. A year ago, Sarasota County stood at 5.6 percent.

DeSoto County's jobless rate dropped from 6.7 percent in November to 5.8 percent last month. In December 2013, DeSoto saw 5.6 percent unemployment.

There is a variety of causes that contribute to the rising economy and, in turn, the decline in joblessness, said John Meyer, dean of the School of Business & Technology at Florida SouthWestern State College. "This is all good news, but it is not attributable to any single

factor," Meyer said. "There are many variables that go into that rate."

One influential ingredient that reaches far and wide is the stock market. While the volatile market is known for its skittish behavior, the past year has shown a definite upward trend. This optimism translates into more vacation travel, Meyer said.

"This makes people feel wealthy," he said, "so more people will come, and they will spend more money."

Certainly, the snowbird migration usually brings benefits to the area this time of year, but the better overall economy is driving greater seasonal spending, he said.

Meyer said industries across the board are demonstrating growth locally. Retail and the service industry, two major job providers, are improving, as are construction, manufacturing and information technology.

Indeed, the Punta Gorda and North Port-Bradenton-Sarasota metro areas led the state in fastest over-the-year job growth, with gains of 4 percent or higher.

The Punta Gorda Metropolitan Statistical Area, which encompasses all of Charlotte County, posted an 18.2 percent annual growth rate in professional and business services, exceeding all Florida metro areas. This broad category, Meyer said, includes such services as financial planning and health management, which are in high-demand among Charlotte's older population.

"You don't need excessive wealth to seek the services of an investment adviser," he said.

In addition, the North Port-Bradenton-Sarasota MSA boasted the state's strongest annual jobgrowth rate in total nonagricultural employment, and also led in education and health services.

The metro area also had the second-strongest annual job-growth rate in both professional and business services (behind Punta Gorda) and manufacturing (behind Naples-Marco Island).

"As all these industries ramp up, they need more workers," Meyer said. "The general economy is certainly on the mend."

Florida's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 5.6 percent in December 2014, down 0.2 percentage point from the November 2014 rate of 5.8 percent, and down 0.7 percentage point from 6.3 percent a year ago. The state's December rate was the lowest since April 2008, when it was 5.4 percent.

Nationally, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate also stands at 5.6 percent.

Florida's annual jobgrowth rate, 3 percent in 2014, has exceeded the nation's rate since April 2012. Nationally, the number of jobs was up 2.1 percent over the year.

The number of Americans seeking unemployment benefits has been near or below 300,000 since September, a historically low level that suggests companies are cutting fewer workers.

More homes selling faster, at higher prices

By BRENDA BARBOSA, STAFF WRITER CHARLOTTE SUN

Season is in full swing, and so is Southwest Florida's real estate market, with both home sales and prices surging.

The latest housing reports released Friday showed closed sales and median prices for single-family homes across the region jumped in December over the previous month, while the number of days on the market shrank.

In Charlotte County, for instance, the Punta Gorda-Port Charlotte-North Port Association of Realtors reported a nearly 25 percent increase in singlefamily home sales between November and December 2014; closed sales in December totaled 361 versus 289 in November. And last month's sales were 11.8 percent higher than in December 2013.

The median sale price for a single-family home also increased from \$136,000 in November to \$145,000 in December 2014. That's compared with a median price of \$140,000 in December 2013. (The median is the midpoint; half the homes sold for more, half for less.) Meanwhile, the median number of days on the market for a single-family home in Charlotte shrank from 47 days in November to 42 days in December. In December 2013, a home spent a median of 61 days on the market.

Similarly, condo sales in Charlotte County increased from a total of 57 closed sales in November to 87 in December. They saw a 26 percent increase over December 2013, which totaled 69. The median number of days on the market also dropped to 32 days in December from 42 days in November, and 63 days a year ago. Median condo prices, however, dropped from November's high of \$131,000 to \$105,000 in December; in December 2013, the median sale price was \$115,000.

"These numbers support the fact that units priced competitively are moving quickly and netting the sellers more money," said Jim Quinn, president of the Realtors association.

Sarasota County's Realtor association reported 659 closed sales in December in the single-

family category, up from 493 in November. Closed sales in December 2013 totaled 621. Meanwhile, the median days on the market for a single-family home dropped from 49 days in December 2013 to 44 days last month.

The median home price, on the other hand, was \$195,500 in December, compared with \$193,000 the previous month, the Sarasota Association of Realtors reported. In December 2013, the median sale price for a single-family home was \$187,000.

Condo sales in Sarasota County fared similar to Charlotte's, with closed sales totaling 270 in December, up from 218 in November, but down from 299 a year ago. Median condo prices in December closed at \$177,500, down from \$175,000 in November, and \$182,000 in December 2013. The median number of days on the market for a condo dropped slightly from 48 days in December 2013 to 45 days last month.

In all, Sarasota closed 2014 with an all-time record of 11,550 closed transactions, topping the 2004 total of 11,482, the association reported.

"This is truly historic news, and clearly demonstrates our region is experiencing a remarkable success story in real estate," SAR president Stafford Starcher said.

Meanwhile, inventory levels across the region remain low.

In a balanced market, real estate experts note, the supply of inventory hovers around five to six months. The months of supply is an estimate of the number of months it will take to deplete the current inventory, given the recent sales rate.

In Charlotte County, the months supply of inventory for single-family homes stands at roughly four, down from about six months in December 2013; inventory for condos also stands at about four months, down from five months last year. Sarasota's supply for single-family homes and condos also was about four months in December, down slightly from last year.

Statewide, closed sales of single-family homes totaled 22,414 in December, up 15.8 percent compared to the year-ago figure, according to data from Florida Realtors. In the condo category, 9,466 units sold statewide last month, up 11.3 percent compared with December 2013.

Meanwhile, the statewide median sale price for existing single-family homes in December was \$185,000, up 6.9 percent from the previous year; for condos, the median price was \$149,000, up 8.4 percent over the previous year, according to Florida Realtors.

Nationally, total existing home sales rose 2.4 percent to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 5.04 million in December, from a downwardly revised 4.92 million in November, the National Association of Realtors reported. From a year ago, December sales were higher by 3.5 percent, and now have seen year-over-year gains for the third straight month.

Airport OKs money for improvements

By BRENDA BARBOSA, STAFF WRITER CHARLOTTE SUN

PUNTA GORDA - The Charlotte County Airport Authority Tuesday accepted state transportation dollars to fund a portion of a multimillion-dollar construction project that will help pilots land better and reduce noise at the Punta Gorda Airport.

The authority had an emergency meeting Tuesday to unanimously approve a joint participation agreement between the Florida Department of Transportation and the airport to share in 10 percent of the cost of a \$2.7 million taxiway required by the Federal Aviation Authority.

The FAA requires the new parallel taxiway be built in conjunction with the installation of an Instrument Landing System, a navigation device that allows pilots to land with more precision. FDOT will fund roughly \$136,000 of the total cost of the project; the CCA will also fund about \$136,000, and the remainder of the \$2.7 million price tag will be paid for by the FAA.

"The FAA wants a parallel taxiway because with the new ILS, if you don't have it, it holds up traffic on the runway," said authority commissioner Rob Hancik. "It moves airplanes quicker around the airport."

Once installed, the ILS will allow pilots to stay on published air courses, which will reduce the impact of engine noise over nearby communities.

"Rather than wandering all over the sky, they can fly with precision," Hancik said.

"Yeah, it just helps them stay on course," said airport assistant director Jim Parish.

Taxiways run alongside runways and allow airplanes to move around the airfield more efficiently. Construction on the taxiways at the Punta Gorda Airport could begin in the summer and will take about six months to finish. Early cost estimates are upward of \$2.7 million.

The terminal project is on pace to be completed by March 2016.

Casto buys 12 acres in Murdock

By Michael Braga, STAFF WRITER Sarasota Herald-Tribune

CHARLOTTE COUNTY - A Lakewood Ranch-based company has bought 12 acres of vacant commercial land for \$1.03 million -- a significant drop from its \$3.22 million price tag 11 years ago.

The buyer of the property at 19200 Veterans Blvd. in Murdock was Casto Port Charlotte LLC, a Lakewood Ranch company managed by J. Brett Hutchens of Casto Lifestyle Properties.

The seller was BMR Funding LLC, a subsidiary of Greenwich, Connecticut-based Silver Point Capital, which had bought it in August 2004, records show.

Casto was one of the first development companies to get back into the shopping-center development business in Florida after the recession with its \$46 million Pier Park North project in Panama City Beach.

"The market is really starting to pick up again, especially in Florida," Hutchens told the Herald-Tribune then. "We are looking to start new projects all over the state."

Casto's parent company is based in Columbus, Ohio, and manages more than 100 shopping centers in eight states that 23 million square feet.

Casto built the Whole Foods Market Center/100 Central retail and condominium complex in downtown Sarasota.

Tamiami Trail office building for \$1.85 million

By Michael Braga, STAFF WRITER Sarasota Herald-Tribune

Civog Family LLC, a Sarasota company managed by Mario Govic, sold a 10,744-square-foot office building at 1090 S Tamiami Trail in Sarasota to CMPS Realty LLC for \$1.85 million.

Govic's company paid \$900,000 for the building in December 2012. It was built in 1978.

CMPS Realty, a Sarasota company managed by Richard Kanter, financed the purchase with a \$1.9 million loan from BMO Harris Bank.

950 acres of Charlotte grove and pasture land - part of a \$363 million shopping spree

By Michael Braga, STAFF WRITER Sarasota Herald-Tribune

Orange Co. LP, an Arcadia company managed by John D. O'Connor sold about 950 acres of grove and pasture land at 45000 Bermont Road in Charlotte County to Alico Inc. for \$4.69 million.

Alico Inc. is a Fort Myers company headed by Clayton G. Wilson. Its stock trades publically on the NASDAQ exchange under the symbol ALCO.

In December, the company spent \$363 million to buy out three Florida Citrus producers - deals which made Alico the largest citrus producer in the United States.

Included in the purchases was a total of 20,263 acres from Orange Co. Alico bought the land for \$274 million, or \$13,552 per acre.

Alico also purchased 7,434 acres from Silver Nip Citrus for \$72 million, or \$9,685 per acre. And it bought 1,241 acres from Gator Grove for \$16.6 million, or \$13,376 per acre.

Alico generated \$7.9 million in profits in 2014 on \$88.7 million in revenues.

FLORIDA ECONOMIC NEWS

- Value of commercial land off Veterans Blvd. in Charlotte County ([Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#))
- With dollar strong, Florida tourism industry watches for impact ([Miami Herald](#))
- Nanotechnology company gets incentives to move to Sarasota County ([Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#))
- FPL's solar farms will cost \$400 million ([South Florida Sun-Sentinel](#))
- Florida sees solid job growth in all sectors in 2014 ([Florida Tax Watch](#))



US ECONOMIC NEWS

- Canadians hope immigration bill will allow them a longer stay ([Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#))
- U.S. services sector activity growth accelerates in January ([Reuters](#))
- Consumer confidence overrides shaky global economy ([Reuters](#))



ENTREPRENEUR NEWS

- UCF seeks expanded entrepreneur program ([Orlando Sentinel](#))

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