

Fresno County jobless rate hits single digits for first time in 6 years

By Bethany Clough



About 7,300 jobs were added in Fresno County in the last 12 months, according to state employment figures announced Friday, Oct. 17, 2014. Health services was one of the areas adding the most jobs, the state says.

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Fresno County's jobless rate fell to 9.5% in September — the first time it's dropped below 10% in six years.

Monthly numbers released Friday by the state Employment Development Department showed the jobless rate was the lowest since September 2008, when it was at 9.4%.

Last month's rate was down from a revised 10% in August, and down from 11.1% in September 2013.

Overall, the county is continuing its slow recovery, with last month marking the 36th month of consecutive year-over-year improvement.

"Growth is continuing to move forward at a slow pace, but moving in the right direction," said Steven Gutierrez, a labor market analyst for the EDD.

But neither the unemployment rate nor the numbers of jobless (more than 35,000 last month in Fresno County alone) include workers who have given up their search for work — people often described as "discouraged workers" who

have dropped out of the official labor force.

And the single-digit rate probably won't last, Gutierrez said. As the farming season comes to an end, unemployment rises, he said.

"I can't say for sure, but based on normal seasonal trends ... August and September is when we see the lowest unemployment and when we get into winter we'll see the unemployment rate tick up again," he said.

Neighboring counties also saw declines in the jobless rate, ranging from Madera County's 8.2% to Tulare County's 11.2%. All central San Joaquin Valley counties had lower rates than a year ago.

The city of Fresno said that its rate dropped from 9.3% in August to 8.9% in September.

California's jobless rate fell slightly to 7.3% and nationally, the rate decreased to 5.9%.

In Fresno County, 1,900 total jobs were added between August and September. Farm jobs fell by 1,400 jobs, but non-farm employment grew by 3,300.

Government had the biggest increase in jobs with 2,200 added. Teachers and school staff made up a chunk of that increase, with those workers again counted as part of the labor force as they return to school, Gutierrez said.

The leisure and hospitality category had the second-largest increase in jobs with 600.

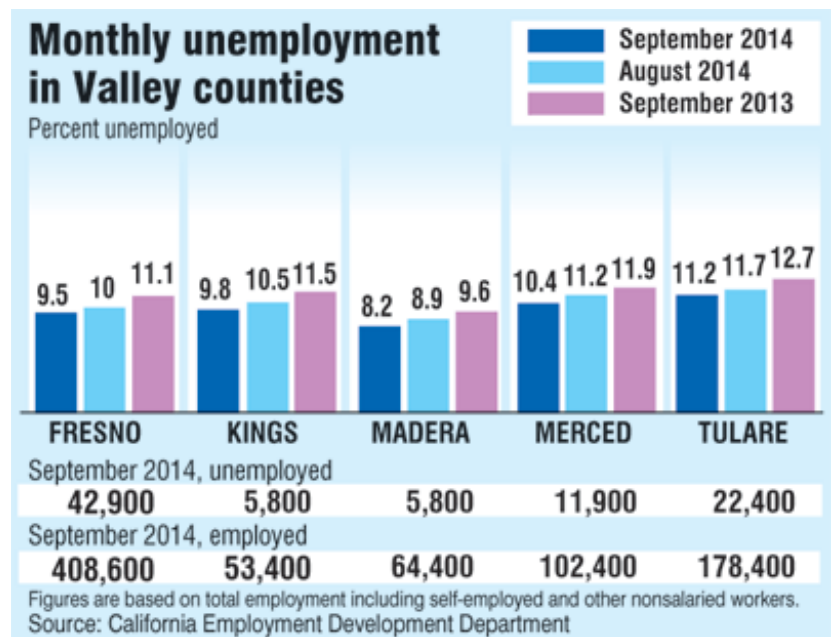
Compared to September of last year, Fresno County added 7,300 jobs. The educational and health services employment had the largest increase, a category that includes social workers and health-care and trade school employees.

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