UCLA economist: Sonoma County job growth tops California, nation

Jeff Quackenbush, Business Journal Staff Reporter
Wednesday, January 23, 2013, 10:10 am
Categories: Breaking News, Employment, Industry News, North Bay News, Sonoma Report, Top News Item, Top News Stories | No Comments

ROHNERT PARK — Sonoma County's economic recession that led to more than 25,000 jobs lost is mostly over, as job growth through most of last year outpaced that of the Bay Area, state and nation as well as nearly matching national growth leader North Dakota, an economist with the closely watched UCLA Anderson Forecast told an annual gathering of civic and business leaders in the county this morning.

Surprising job growth in the county is in the industry sectors that are growing nationwide, according to Jerry Nickelsburg, Ph.D., senior economist of UCLA's Anderson School of Management, told several hundred at the Doubletree hotel.

"In Sonoma County, almost all the recession is over with," Dr. Nickelsburg said.

California job growth of nearly 2 percent in 2012 through November compared with the same pace the year before was the 10th best in the country, but Sonoma County's payroll growth of more than 5 percent through much of the year bested growth in other regions of the state, according to Dr. Nickelsburg.

"You all are up there with North Dakota, but people actually live here," he said.

Annual job growth off the farm or vineyard in Sonoma County, at almost 5 percent, was barely behind that of North Dakota.

U.S. gross domestic product growth has been mostly between 1 percent to 3 percent since 2009 and is expected to maintain that slow pace until mid-2014, Dr. Nickelsburg predicted.

California's economic growth should slow this year and pick up next year, with the state's unemployment rate lowering to the nation's rate by the end of 2014. The state lost 1.5 million jobs in the recession and has regained less than half so far.

Sonoma County's employment growth has been spread across a number of industries, notably manufacturing, tourism and wine, according to Ben Stone, executive director of the Sonoma County Economic Development Board, which hosted the State of the County event.

"It's a real testament to how we've been able to bounce back," Mr. Stone said.

The county business-confidence index, tabulated from surveys of local businesses recently, was 6.3 for winter 2012, almost back to the level of 2006, according to Mr. Stone. That's when a falloff in home sales started to erode the local economy.

About half the local executives surveyed said they planned to increase purchases of equipment this year, and more than 40 percent would increase hiring.

A looming pressure on the county's job growth potential is what Mr. Stone called a coming "silver tsunami," in which 40,000 would reach retirement age in the next 10 years. That would be almost 23 percent of the average county workforce of 170,000.

Link to article: **http://www.northbaybusinessjournal.com/67777/ucla-anderson-economist-says-sonoma-co-job-growth-tops-nation/**

© 1988–2013 North Bay Business Journal. Copyright policy:
http://www.northbaybusinessjournal.com/contact/copyright-policy/.